MATOAKA

William G. Burleigh

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A STORY OF THE FIGHT FOR AMERICANISM

BY

WILLIAM GRANT BURLEIGH

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Dedicated
To
All Loyal Americans

Let every American, every lover of liberty, every well-wisher to his posterity swear by the blood of the Revolution never to violate in the least particular the laws of the country, and never to tolerate their violation by others. As the patriots of '76 did to the support of the Declaration of Independence, so to the support of the Constitution and the laws, let every American pledge his life, his property, and his sacred honor; let every man remember that to violate the law is to trample upon the blood of his fathers and to tear the charter of his own and his children's liberty. Let reverence for the laws be breathed by every American mother to the lisping babe that prattles on her lap. Let it be taught in schools, in seminaries, and in colleges. Let it be written in primers, spelling books, and almanacs. Let it be preached from the pulpit, proclaimed in legislative halls, and enforced in courts of justice. In short, let it become the political religion of the Nation.

Abraham Lincoln.

CONTENTS

I	The Whitfields	13
II	The Preacher	22
III	The Young Surveyor	28
IV	The Fox Chase	35
V	School Days	44
VI	The Street Meeting	51
VII	War Clouds	56
VIII	In France	67
IX	King of the Moonshiners	76
X	Malcomson Visits Matoaka	91
XI	The Sheriff Stages a Raid	99
XII	Planning Politcal Reform	110
XIII	Felix Raids a Hornet's Nest	119
XIV	The New Deputy Sheriff	126
XV	Matoaka Offers to Marry Felix	136
XVI	A Race with Death	146
XVII	In Rattlesnake Glen	158
XVIII	The Election	164
XIX	Last Stand of the Outlaws	171
XX	A Day of Mourning	180
XXI	A New Day	184

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I

The Whitfields

Alonzo Whitfield sat slumped in a home-made hickory armchair on his front porch, slowly puffing at the long stem of an old cob pipe filled with home-grown, home-cured tobacco. He was watching the sun as it dipped behind a high ridge of mountains to the westward, with a dreamy look in his half-closed eyes. A bright Spring day was peacefully dying.

The peaks of the Big Black mountains in the distance wore a halo of golden glory lent by the rays of the sinking sun. Dark shadows were gathering in the lower reaches of the canyons and hollows along the hillsides, and a thin vapory mist rose from the meadows and the mountain stream that meandered and rippled through them.

The Whitfield home was an old story-and-a-half hewed-log building with a stone chimney at each end and a lean-to cook room attached to the rear. The house stood well back from the

road in a grove of ancient oaks, whose wide flung branches almost hid it from view. Behind it dark, heavily timbered mountains loomed high, casting a somber shade. A wide yard enclosed by a ramshackle paling fence ran down to the road, to which untrimmed grapevines clung, trying, apparently, to hold it up. A few straggling rose bushes, hollyhocks, and other old-fashioned flowers, with a sprinkling of catnip and sage here and there, adorned the yard.

Mrs. Whitfield was busy in the back lot with her chickens, cows and unweaned calves, while her eldest daughter, a tall, slender, sweet-faced girl of fifteen, assisted by a younger sister, was washing up the supper dishes. Several smaller children were playing about the yard. Half a dozen lean fox hounds lolled on the porch or nosed about among the pots and kettles on the kitchen floor.

Whitfield was a genuine East Kentuckian type —tall, raw-boned and muscular, his eyes steely blue and his high, receding forehead surmounted by a shock of iron gray hair. A long, black, drooping mustache adorned his upper lip, lending his none-too-handsome face a sinister expression. Although about fifty years of age he was still erect and vigorous. His ancestors for several generations back had lived and died amid the

eternal hills surrounding their simple homes, tilling the stony land along the creeks and in the valleys; rearing, and somehow managing to feed, large families of sturdy boys and girls, who in their turn repeated the process of living much as their fathers and mothers before them had done.

The Whitfield family was of the better class, law abiding and peaceable, avoiding the brawls, feuds and illicit liquor traffic which for years had involved their neighbors in much bloodshed and unhappiness.

Mrs. Whitfield was several years younger than her husband, somewhat inclined to corpulency, but of pleasing appearance and manner; soft spoken, intelligent, and like her husband, native born. Her brown hair was beautifully abundant, and inclined to curl around a plump face in which were set eyes that smiled always, serenely, quietly. Like all mountain people, she had been reared amid toil and hardship, sometimes lending a hand to clear the land and plant and harvest the crops. She kept her home and children in much better order than most of the mothers and housekeepers in the community, and maintained neighborly relations with the people of the whole countryside. Sickness and death enlisted her sympathies and services wherever and whenever needed; old and young affectionately called her

"Ma" because of her motherly instincts and all-embracing friendliness. She was a faithful attendant at the little church where the itinerant preacher occasionally conducted services, and her home was always open to him and to other wayfarers who might pass her door.

Alonzo Whitfield had inherited about five hundred acres of wild mountain land from his father, which, because of its distance from the railroad, had little present, but great potential value. Coal had not yet been discovered on his holdings, but as it was known to exist not many miles away, many believed it would eventually be found. The natives had not troubled to investigate the possible stores of mineral wealth which might be locked beneath the soil over which they toiled and hunted year after year. They were satisfied with the world as they found it and content to follow the well-beaten paths of their forefathers.

Whitfield's armchair reveries were abruptly and somewhat violently broken in upon by a tremendous clatter of horse's hoofs coming up the road from the direction of the village, which lay a few miles west of his farm. The clatter of hoofs was answered by an even louder commotion made by the hounds and the children as they ran helter skelter, barking and shrieking,

toward the gate, to greet the rider as he drew rein, and swinging himself lightly from his horse, approached the house. He paused occasionally to caress the capering dogs or chase the scampering children, all of whom appeared delighted at his coming.

The newcomer was the Whitfields' eldest son, a husky, rollicking youngster of seventeen or eighteen years, whose chief joys in life were fishing, hunting 'possums and coons, or spending the nights on the hills with his trained pack of hounds, listening to the music of their harmonious voices as they pursued their quarry over the mountains. He bore the unusual name of Stony Jack, a contraction of the original one given him, Stonewall Jackson.

On the stormy February night of his birth, his father had remained awake all night in front of the blazing log fire on the hearth, poring over the pages of a tattered old school history in search of a name for so important a personage as the new arrival. Lighting upon the story of Stonewall Jackson's immortal stand at Bull Run, Alonzo seized upon the name for his son,—that is, if the baby should prove to be a boy. Great was his delight when the doctor announced the safe arrival of a male heir to the Whitfield name and estate. Slipping awkwardly into the room

where his young hopeful was testing out his newly discovered lungs, Alonzo announced to the happy mother the historic name selected for her son.

"Aw, 'Lonzo," she protested, "don't call him that hard name. Why, when I want to give him a pet name it will have to be Stony Jack, and that's awful. There's nothing else to make out of it."

But Alonzo was inflexible in his determination to honor the hero of the South, as well as his own family, and the child was christened Stonewall Jackson Whitfield—later, as his mother had predicted, his name was reduced to Stony Jack.

When the second child appeared on the scene, Alonzo got out his old history once more, and after diligent search, came upon the original name of Pocahontas, the Indian maid who figured so prominently in the early history of Virginia. So the first daughter born to the Whitfields was christened Matoaka—a beautiful, musical name, which refused to yield itself to contraction or corruption.

* * * * * * * *

As Stony Jack came up to the porch he handed his father a paper, saying, "Here's yer Bible, dad!" It was the *Courier-Journal,* a sheet made famous beyond the state lines by the brilliant

editorship of Henry Watterson, under whose administration the paper had indeed become the political bible of a vast number of Kentuckians.

"I heard some good news in town today, dad," said Stony Jack after his father had glanced through his paper.

"Yes?" Alonzo drawled enquiringly.

"Yep," Stony Jack continued, "the railroad is comin' this way, sure. Dan Wheeler, he was down to Lexington, and heerd 'bout it. He says she'll be in soon. The surveyors are workin' now." There was a pause during which the younger man seemed to wait for some expression from the older. At length he continued, "Judge Hull, he said this new road's goin' to play hell with this country. He said it'll fetch in furriners and sharpers an' white trash what'll make so powerful much c'ot doin's that he'll be dinged if he'll have any time fer fishin' or fox chasin' or seven-up and poker. He said he guessed he'd hev to resign and move furder back. The preacher he spoke up an' said, 'Judge, you are entirely off in yer judgment. You only look on the dark side.' The preacher said, 'Mebby there'll come some bad people, but thar'll come men with money that'll put up saw-mills an' work up the timber, an' build good roads, an' schools an' churches, an' open coal mines, an' give work to

lots of people, an' bring to the country the blessin's of civilization.' Everybody cheered what the preacher said, but Judge Hull, he said, 'You all jest wait an' see, jest wait an' see!' Dad, mebby they might find coal on yer land, an' then me an' Matoaka kin go to school, when yer rich."

"Oh, wouldn't that be grand," cried Matoaka, who had joined them in time to hear her brother's last remarks. "Stony Jack, why don't you go out and hunt for coal?"

The brother and sister had completed the meager course of study offered in the little ungraded school near their home, and, encouraged by their teachers and the preacher, were ambitious to go to college—an ambition that seemed doubtful of realization. Alonzo Whitfield and Ma did not share the high aims of their children. Neither had received much formal instruction and they had but little appreciation of the value or pleasures of an education. Alonzo, consequently, smiled indulgently upon the excited Stony Jack and Matoaka, but took little real interest in the news of the proposed railroad.

But long after the rest of the family had retired to rest, the two young people sat on the porch, enlarging upon their mutual aspirations, building fanciful castles in the air, and planning what they would do when the marvelous dreams came

true. Like spiders in the night, they set about creating filmy, shadowy, flimsy, beautiful things that would crumble at the first contact with reality, but with the optimism of youth they found immense pleasure in dreaming.

II

The Preacher

"Here comes the preacher!" shouted one of the Whitfield children next morning, just as Alonzo and Stony Jack were starting out to plow their corn land. A man on horseback rode leisurely up to the gate, and Alonzo turned back and called to him, "Git down, preacher, an' come in. 'Pears like yer travellin' airly this mornin'. Come in an' make yerself at home 'til dinner. Me an' the boys is way behind in plowin' 'count of so much rain this Spring. More rain than I ever seed in one Spring."

The man addressed as preacher remained seated on his horse. He was about the same age as Alonzo, but looked much younger. At the urgent request of Whitfield to dismount, he replied, "No, Brother Whitfield, I must go on. I have a long ride beyond the ridge where I am to conduct a funeral this evening and then hold a few preaching services. I just wanted to give you a word of warning in passing. The new railroad is coming soon, and with it will come speculators and capitalists and, as Judge Hull says, sharpers. Real

estate will boom. You have some fine timber lands, and I believe coal, too. Don't sell or lease your land without first consulting a lawyer or someone capable of protecting your interests."

"Yes," admitted Alonzo, "Stony Jack told me 'bout it an' what Jedge Hull said. I sort o' agree with the Jedge. We all are gittin' on well enough in these parts."

"You don't understand, Whitfield," the preacher remonstrated earnestly. "God has filled these mountains with timber and coal of immense value. It only requires a railroad to develop our resources and open up markets. Following the railroad there will come enterprising people who will build good roads, better schools and churches, and the splendid brainy boys and girls of these mountains will be given a better chance in life than their fathers 'ever had. I have hoped and prayed to see this day."

"Mebby yer right, preacher, mebby yer right," the mountaineer answered dubiously. "I'll sure take yer advice about sellin', at any rate. I'll make you my lawyer, fur I know they cain't buy you like they kin some."

"I'm afraid," the preacher continued earnestly, "that many of our people will lose through a failure to understand the value of their holdings, selling them too cheaply."

With this parting advice, the preacher wheeled his horse back into the road again, and although Alonzo urged him to stay for dinner he declined, continuing on his mission of mercy.

The preacher, by reason of his long and faithful service, had become a sort of oracle among the mountaineers. He came to them a young man just out of college, drawn to the mountains by reports of the appalling state of spiritual destitution existing among the people, and for a quarter of a century had devoted himself with unflagging zeal and consecration to the task set before him by the Master. He lived among the mountaineers, sharing in their poverty and privations and sorrows, always seeking to guide them aright and to cultivate in their hearts a desire and taste for better and more worthwhile things. By virtue of his high calling, he had ready access to the homes of all, poor and rich alike. He cultivated the friendship of all classes. After years of trial they had learned to respect him, trust him and love him. He was present in their glad hours of rejoicing, and sat among them in the dark hours of bereavement. He sat by the bedside of their loved ones as they slipped into the shadows cast by the wings of the angel of death, speaking words of hopeful cheer, or reading some consolatory passages from the

volume of God's Word. He stood by freshly made graves in the little family burial places on the hillsides, speaking the parting words over the sleeping forms beneath, as the final chapter in the book of life was concluded.

Old and young, parents and children, called him "Preacher." Not from any feeling of disrespect or undue familiarity, but because it was a title which, to their simple hearts, embraced all the manifold offices of his calling, and was expressive of their high regard for him as a man of God, their friend and counselor in all the most sacred relations of life. Nowhere else on earth is the relation of people and preacher more simple, unaffected, intimate, and mutually helpful than among the mountaineers. Seated by the blazing wood fire on the open hearth on a cold winter night, or under the leafy shade of the trees in summer, he would charm and delight the hungry hearts of the children, gathered in crowds about him, with hero stories culled from mythological tales, or from the Bible. Sometimes he would take them on imaginary journeys visiting far-off lands, with their strange people and stranger customs; to great cities, with tall buildings and wide streets crowded with busy throngs. He would sail with them along broad rivers, bordered with pleasant homes, fields and bustling towns;

or go aboard the great ocean steamers that plow the boundless sea. Sometimes he would even take them on flights to distant planets, far beyond the reach of the naked eye. The children, and many grown-ups, too, would sit rigid in open-eyed, open-mouthed wonder during the recital of these tales, forgetting mealtime and bedtime alike in their fascination.

On one such occasion, an especially hot afternoon, while thus seated under the shady branches of the big oaks in the Whitfield yard, the preacher, after entertaining his audience with enchanting fairy tales, stopped suddenly and mopped his face, saying, "Children, let us play we are fairies! Just imagine that some good, kind fairy has come and touched each of us with her magic wand, and transported us to some far-off city and put us down in one of the beautiful shady parks that abound there. There are sparkling fountains of clear, cool water, and flowers everywhere, and birds singing in the branches of the trees; and there are gaily dressed little girls to bring us cooling drinks and huge dishes of ice cream."

At the mention of ice cream, one small, freckle-faced urchin stood tensely erect, his eyes bulging with disbelief. He interrupted to demand loudly,

"Say, preacher, whar yer goin' to git ice on a hot day like this?"

"Why, my boy," replied the preacher, smiling at the youngster's incredulous expression, "men have discovered how to freeze ice in the hottest weather. They freeze large blocks of it, blocks bigger than you."

The boy's face assumed an expression of scornful doubt; manifestly, he was experiencing a keen sense of loss of confidence in the integrity of his preacher. He turned slowly away, all the enthusiasm and interest gone from his face, and he remarked scornfully, "Aw, gwan, preacher! Wacher givin' us? Yer know Gawd A'mity hisself couldn't do thataway!"

III

The Young Surveyor

A few weeks after the epoch-making news of the arrival of the railroad had stirred the community into two rival camps of excited debaters who spent days in considering the comparative advantages and disadvantages of the enterprise, the surveyors gave fresh impetus to the discussion by moving their camp up to within a few miles of the town, and taking up a line of survey that led directly into the heart of the Big Black range.

Stony Jack grew so excited when the thrilling news became known that his father had great difficulty in holding him on the farm until the Spring work was completed. Railroads, coal mining, saw-mills, colleges and money-making were now Stony Jack's daily and nightly themes for elaborate discussion. He assumed to be quite an authority on all the subjects, an assumption to which the family good-naturedly subscribed.

Having finished with the main part of the Summer's work, the young fellow conceived the

idea that the surveyors needed his services to hurry their good work along, and gave his father no rest until he secured permission to visit the camp and investigate the matter for himself. To his unbounded delight he found that the surveyors had need of a strong, active boy or man to carry chain and drive stakes, one familiar with the country preferred. Stony Jack soon convinced them that he was the only young man in the whole region who could perform these duties to their complete satisfaction, and his enthusiasm, knowledge of the country, and willingness to work, and work hard, favorably impressed the chief engineer. So Stony Jack unexpectedly found himself actively engaged in pioneering the first railroad into his country.

His promotion to so important a position made him fairly dizzy, and excited the envy of all the young men of his acquaintance. At the same time he became an object of admiration and especial attention among the girls of the neighborhood and surrounding mountainside, for the news of his achievement had spread to other villages in the vicinity.

He went to work with a hearty good will, confident that he had placed his foot on the first round of the ladder of success—a ladder that, to his boyish fancy, mounting heavenward like

Jack's beanstalk, must inevitably lead to fame and fortune. He was charmed with his new life and associates. It was his first intimate contact with educated men from the lowlands. At first he regarded them with feelings of awe, as supermen, but shortly discovered that they were only ordinary mortals having the advantages of travel, culture and refinement. This discovery increased his zeal to acquire these advantages for himself. As the keen mind of Stony Jack grasped more of the intricate details of surveying, he resolved that he, too, would some day be a civil engineer, although he was uncertain of the exact meaning of the term.

The surveyors took a great fancy to Stony Jack. His never-failing good humor, cheerfulness and enthusiasm for his work excited their admiration. At night around the campfire, he would entertain them with his droll humor and interesting stories of mountain life—of 'possum and coon hunting, fox chasing, feuds, and moonshiners' wild ways. He promised them some real and thrilling sport later in the season: an extraordinary fox chase by expert fox chasers. As only two of the surveyors had ever indulged in the sport, they all looked forward to the occasion with high expectations.

The route of the surveyors led directly through

the Whitfield neighborhood, and their camp was later moved to a fine location on Alonzo's farm. This arrangement materially increased the Whitfield income through the sale of fresh vegetables, milk, butter, and an occasional chicken for Sunday dinner. Stony Jack refused to quit the camp for the comforts of home. He would stick to his newly acquired friends and share the hardships and responsibilities of the great public enterprise in which they were engaged. He had become an essential adjunct to the undertaking, and could not be spared from the evening entertainment around the campfires.

Working one day in a remote corner of the Whitfield farm where a small creek ran down the mountainside, Stony Jack found the ground unusually hard for driving stakes. Rock appeared to lie near the surface over a wide area. In tearing away some obstructions in his way, he slipped and dislodged a great mass of dirt, exposing what seemed to be a ledge of black rock.

"Coal!" shouted one of the party who was familiar with mining, and all fell to digging and scraping, uncovering an eight-foot vein of the finest quality of bituminous coal. Surveying was suspended for the day. Excitement ran high among the surveyors as they fell to speculating

on the effect the discovery would have on the future of the country and the road building.

Stony Jack broke a speed record reaching home to spread the news. "Spread" is used advisedly, for spread it he did, with shouting and leaping, throwing his hat in the air, and working his arms like a windmill in a gale.

The family, observing his frantic movements from afar off, concluded that he had run into a yellow jacket's nest and tried to shut him out of the house. It was some time before he could calm himself sufficiently to talk coherently, and when at last he was able to convey the good news to them, Matoaka and all the little Whitfields joined in their brother's war dance. The half dozen hounds, thinking a fox chase was proposed, set up a loud baying, and pandemonium reigned for some time.

The news of the find spread rapidly, and as other discoveries were made, speculators and prospectors arrived in flocks and droves. The fears of the preacher were realized. Many land owners sold for a fraction of the real value of their holdings, though to their inexperienced minds the amounts they received were fabulous sums. Others leased on ridiculously low royalties. But Whitfield and a few others kept their heads and farms until granted a fair proposition.

The surveyors assured Stony Jack that his father would now become a rich man, and he could realize his ambition for an education without driving stakes or carrying chain. But he declared it to be his purpose to hold his position on the surveying squad at least until school opened.

Stony Jack and Matoaka lived among the clouds. The sudden and unexpected discovery had effected a complete change in their scheme of life. To their fevered imaginations, one of the preacher's fairy tales had come true before their very eyes. A good fairy had, with her magic wand, touched the dark, gloomy, rocky hills behind their house, and changed everything into gold.

When the preacher rode their way they overwhelmed him with questions and rapid-fire talk about coal, schools, books, places and how to get there. He was wonderfully pleased over the cheering news. He had for a long time cherished the hope that Stony Jack and Matoaka might have a chance for a more advanced education than their mountain school offered. They seemed to him superior in many ways to the majority of their associates, and he longed for the opportunity to prove his judgment correct.

For many days the brother and sister discussed

the merits of various schools suitable for students of their attainments, and at last decided on one located in the heart of the great Appalachian range not many miles from their home, at a point where three great states are joined together. A school founded by patriotic, liberty-loving men and women, who sought to perpetuate in the hearts of their countrymen the true spirit of Americanism as exemplified in the life, character and utterances of that Kentuckian of Kentuckians, that American of Americans, who fared forth from a rude log cabin in a wilderness and carved for himself a commanding niche in the hall of the world's immortals. By teaching the youth of America the honesty, loyalty, and devotion to lofty ideals of Abraham Lincoln, the promoters and patrons of this school hoped to erect a living memorial to the illustrious martyr which would outlast marble and granite. And while this living memorial survived, "Government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth."

IV

The Fox Chase

A few days before going away to school Stony Jack resigned his responsible position on the surveying squad in order to plan for the great fox chase he had promised his co-laborers. This fox chase was to be no ordinary event—no scrub race run by common hounds—but a magnificent contest of speed and endurance by thoroughbreds, directed by old masters of the sport. It was the young mountaineer's best and final entertainment for his friends before separating from them, perhaps forever.

The preacher, a dear lover of the sport, entered enthusiastically into the spirit of the occasion and gave his best efforts in aiding Stony Jack to make the chase one never to be forgotten; to set, if possible, a standard that would never be surpassed.

One of the surveyors, Shelby Gibson, was, like Stony Jack, passionately fond of fox hunting, and had brought along a high-bred, well-trained young dog named Lightning to add to the pack. The

two sportsmen were continually discussing the relative merits of their dogs and boasting of their accomplishments.

"My old dog, Bob, kin beat yourn any day!" declared Stony Jack with emphasis. "He always comes in ahead in every race."

"Well, when Lightning runs with him, Bob will not even be in sight at the finish," boasted Gibson. "That will be one time when the rule will be reversed."

"Aw, yer old dog may be fast," said Stony Jack, "but chasin' foxes is a game where speed ain't the whole thing. Bob he knows the science o' readin' a fox's mind an' that helps a heap."

"Well, I'll bet my dog against yours," declared Gibson, "that Bob don't come in ahead of Lightning, science or no science. Speed and stamina are the things that count in a race."

"Not every time," demurred Stony Jack, "an' I don't want to take yer dog fur nothing."

"You're afraid!" said Gibson, with a sneer. "You don't dare put your scrub against a thoroughbred."

"No, I ain't afraid," retorted Stony Jack calmly, "an' ef you want to give yer dog away, I'll bet you. You'll be feelin' sore, though, when you kiss Lightning good-bye, for he's goin' to be my dog."

"Don't worry about me, boy," said Gibson confidently. "You will be doing the kissing act and grieving over a lost dog, though he isn't much dog to grieve over."

"I'll make you take that back, Gibson, before the race ends," said Stony Jack, and there was a cold ring in his voice. "I didn't want to bet, nor take yer dog, but now I'll do both."

Tremendous interest was aroused in the neighborhood over the impending fox chase and many side bets were made. It was conspicuous that all the mountaineers were keen to bet on old Bob, though they admitted that Lightning might be the faster of the two dogs. "But," they said, "old Bob has a curious way of always gittin' ahead on the home stretch."

To make the race more interesting, several other men were invited to bring their dogs and enter them as pacemakers for the champions. This was to be a record-breaking contest between the lowlands and the highlands—between the aristocracy of the bluegrass region and the "hill billies" of the coal field. The stakes were high, that which a fox hunter values next to his life—his favorite dog.

The night set for the chase was ideal. Following a light shower, the air was crisp with the first touches of approaching frost. A dozen men

and boys with as many dogs, all keyed up to the highest pitch of tension over the prospects of a night of unusual sport and exciting adventure, made their way toward the scene of the entertainment.

All entered gaily into the hilarity of the event; all except one member of the surveying party, a short, fat man, unaccustomed to mountain climbing and inexperienced in the ways of the forest. He found great difficulty in keeping up with the swift pace of the mountaineers, clambering over fallen trees, jumping ravines, and extricating himself from entangling briars and treacherous grapevines that had an ugly way of catching and tripping him. His clumsy inexperience made him the object of a great deal of good-natured raillery from his comrades.

It was nearly midnight before the dogs struck a warm trail, and then they raised a cunning old red fox that on many former occasions had given a good account of himself. The entertainment, with a prelude of tremendous noise, opened suddenly as the entire pack of hounds in full cry gave chase.

Lightning at once took the lead, and his clear, musical voice could be heard above all the others, as it rang out like a bell on the still night air. Old Bob seemed to have made a bad start and

after a few loud yelps from the rear of the pack, subsided into a strange silence.

"Now," cried Shelby Gibson triumphantly, "I reckon you see who has the fastest dog. Why your dog isn't even capable of making any noise."

"I ain't bettin' on the noise Bob makes," replied Stony Jack. "I'm bettin' he comes in ahead at the finish."

"Well, the fastest dog will be the one ahead at the finish," exclaimed Gibson gleefully, "and just listen to Lightning! He's leading by a mile!"

"I'm bettin' on the finish," repeated Stony Jack quietly.

"Hear the kid rave," jeered Gibson. "Bob will have to outrun Lightning to beat him at the finish, won't he?"

"Mebby he will an' mebby he won't," said Stony Jack coolly. "That's Bob's lookout. I let him manage his own races!"

"All right, sonny, the leading dog at the finish is the winner and his owner takes the other dog," said Gibson, and the expression on his face left no doubt as to the dog he thought would win.

"Sure thing!" said Stony Jack, evidently undisturbed by the apparent poor showing made by Bob.

The old fox had led the pack in a wide swing to the south, until the mingled cries of the hounds

grew faint as a whispered echo; then, as the fox doubled back, the sound swelled gradually to a higher key, the voices blending in perfect unison like a mighty choral under the guiding hand of a trained director.

"Hear that heavenly music!" shouted the frenzied Gibson to the short fat man, as he caught the clear silvery tones of Lightning's hunting cry still leading the chase. The fat man was seated on a log puffing contentedly at his long pipe stem and apparently did not hear Gibson's exclamation.

"Don't you hear it?" yelled Gibson, slapping him on the back.

"Hear what?" inquired the other indifferently.

"Hear that heavenly music!"

The fat man took his pipe from his mouth, listening intently for a moment, and then drawled contemptuously, "Naw, I can't hear anything for those damned hounds." A shout from the crowd greeted this remark, and Gibson threw up his hands in despair and walked away.

Stony Jack was standing quietly enjoying the music of one of nature's magnificent concerts, so absorbed that he appeared oblivious to the fact that Bob seemed to be suffering a complete defeat in the race.

"Do you give it up now?" inquired Gibson,

dancing about in great glee. "It's daylight and the fox will soon have to surrender. Lightning is still ahead; where do you reckon Bob is? I bet he has gone home ashamed of himself."

"We ain't at the finish yet," replied Stony Jack placidly.

Morning had come and the eastern peaks and ridges were tinged with the brightening glow of the rising sun. The fox was coming back up the wide valley now, evidently heading for a gap in the ridge about a quarter of a mile from the point where the hunters stood, and quite near the starting point of the chase.

Gibson was still dancing and shouting to his dog as the hounds drew nearer. "Prepare to weep," he called to Stony Jack, "and get ready to kiss old Bob good-bye; that is, if you can find him."

The dogs were racing swiftly up the valley in full cry. As they dashed across an open piece of country their cry suddenly ceased.

"Lookee yonder!" exclaimed Stony Jack, pointing toward the valley. The crowd stood speechless in amazement and Gibson's dancing instantly ceased. An immense golden eagle with a wing-spread of not less than ten feet came swooping down from the top of a tall pine tree. As he arose slowly from the ground, he held in the

vice-like clutches of his powerful talons a struggling, howling dog. Just then a shot rang out on the other side of the valley and the eagle was observed to hesitate in its flight, hover in midair for a moment and then drift slowly toward the ground. A squirrel hunter had fired the lucky shot.

"See who's comin' here!" shouted Stony Jack, pointing toward the gap in the ridge. Everyone looked in the direction he indicated, and the astonished Gibson saw the tired fox coming toward them with old Bob running close on his heels in full cry, apparently as fresh and fleet as when he started.

"Well, I'm damned!" muttered Gibson in wide-eyed astonishment. "Is that a ghost or a real dog?"

Lightning was still clutched in the death grip of the eagle, but his owner lost no time in reaching the spot where bird and dog had fallen together and released him, badly but not fatally torn by the sharp talons.

"Come and get your dog, Stony Jack," called Gibson, patting the injured dog affectionately. "I guess you've won!"

"Nope, he's yourn," said Stony Jack. "I don't want him. He didn't have no show agin old Bob, an' I won't rob you."

"He had a good chance until that eagle interfered," averred Gibson confidently. "He was winning easily."

"Nope, yer all wrong, Mr. Gibson," insisted Stony Jack. "He never had a show. You see, Bob knows that fox an' all his funny tricks. Bob knowed the fox would come back through that gap when he got tired playin' with the hounds. So when he got the chase started, Bob went up in the gap an' laid down on a rock an' listened to the music 'til old red came back, an' then Bob joined in the fun. There ain't no dog on earth kin beat Bob comin' in on the home stretch, an' that's what I always bet on!"

"Well, I'm damned," said Gibson in disgust. "Let's go home!"

V

School Days

Excitement was at fever heat in the Whitfield home for many days succeeding the great coal discovery on the farm. In consequence of it Stony Jack and Matoaka were really going away to school; going out into that great, wonderful, mysterious world of which they had heard so much and seen so little. Alonzo and his good-natured wife viewed the whole matter with quiet satisfaction—glad of the opportunity afforded them of gratifying the wishes of their children. As far as they were personally concerned, the discovery made but little difference. They would continue to travel in the narrow groove in which they had traveled all their lives, and in which they were content.

The days and nights preceding the high day of the young people's departure were crowded with bustling and excited preparations for the wonderful journey, a journey that would lead, they hoped, to the realization of their long-cherished ambitions. Matoaka and Stony Jack

were going to have more good clothes and books —and real trunks from the city, in which to store their treasures—than their wildest fancies had ever anticipated. There were many sleepless nights and busy days of talking and packing—a work supervised by Ma Whitfield, who was careful to see that nothing was forgotten that might be useful to the children in their new home; a home that to her maternal heart seemed strange and very far away. At length the all-important morning broke clear and serene, an omen of good fortune.

Feeling unequal to the task, their father prevailed upon the preacher to make the journey with them and arrange for the children's board and tuition at the college whither they were bound. This was an entirely agreeable arrangement to the preacher, for he was anxious to visit the college and meet once more friends of former days. Especially did he wish to greet his old friend Dean Fordney, whose long and faithful services in the institution had proved a benediction upon the heads and homesick hearts of many new students, lonely and frightened amid strange surroundings that were so utterly different from the familiar ones they had left for the first time in life.

A couple of boys who lived in the neighbor-

hood, aroused by Stony Jack's enthusiasm and urging, had decided to accompany the party on the journey, and they all set out together in high spirits.

As the nearest railway station was, under favorable circumstances, a good day's drive distant, an early start was made in order that the town might be reached by nightfall. The trip was made in a heavy road-wagon drawn by a pair of strong mules over an exceedingly rough road, cut by deep gullies and full of large rocks. The going was slow and tedious, and the boys walked much of the way, Matoaka joining them occasionally to rest her cramped limbs.

The season was early Autumn, the most delightful of all the year in the mountain regions. The sky was clear, save for a light haze caused by distant forest fires. The gum and maple trees were exchanging their Summer's green for the many-colored draperies they assume at the approach of frost, and all the mountainsides were gaily decked in a rich profusion of red and purple and gold—as if nature were adorning herself in holiday garb in honor of the young travelers.

Noonday lunch was eaten by the roadside, where a spring of clear, cold water gushed from beneath a huge, rocky cliff and went dancing and singing toward the river. The mules were watered

and fed, and while they all rested, the preacher, at the request of Stony Jack, told them interesting stories of pioneer days, when the early settlers fought their way through the trackless forests, opposed by savages and wild beasts. He related how Daniel Boone had traversed the country, long before other white men had dared to venture so far from the settlements and how, at a point not many miles away, he had led a war party against the Indians in a fierce battle, in which several on both sides, including a son of Boone, were slain.

Matoaka was in her happiest mood, enjoying the sensations of traveling through an entirely new and wonderful country, and gathering wild flowers and chinquepins by the way. The boys chased squirrels and chipmunks, and threw rocks until their arms ached.

Late in the evening the lights of the town gleamed through the gathering darkness and the weary pilgrims made their way to the only hotel in the place and secured lodgings for the night—the first the youngsters had ever spent in a public hostelry. It was a novel and thrilling experience. They wrote their names across the page of the large book on the clerk's desk, ate in the immense dining-room, where they were served by the first colored waiters they had ever

seen, and rode up two floors in an elevator with a consequent strange sensation in the pit of their stomachs. They were beginning to feel like regular globe-trotters.

After a restful night and bountiful breakfast, the preacher took his charges on a sight-seeing tour of the one important street of the city. This offered new wonders to their bulging eyes. They viewed show-windows full of beautiful things, and entered a few of the larger stores. But the one bewildering vision that held them enthralled was the dazzling ten cent store. The preacher had great difficulty in preventing them from spending all their money, and still more trouble in getting them out of the store in time to catch the train. As it was, after inspecting and pricing everything displayed, notwithstanding the price tags conspicuously displayed on the counters, they were all, including the preacher, laden down with small, oddly shaped packages. Matoaka was in raptures over a wrist-watch, a bracelet, a string of beads, a powder puff and a bottle of perfume—all of which she purchased for the sum of fifty cents. The next time she was to make this same journey she was wiser, but never again was she so supremely happy.

The train carried them over the remaining miles which intervened between them and the end

of their journey, supplying a series of thrills that kept them in constant agitation, varying from fright to amusement. At last, dashing out of a long tunnel into a beautiful valley, the school buildings which were their objective appeared among the Norway maples that shaded the beautiful, broad campus.

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Weeks, months and years followed that eventful day when Matoaka and Stony Jack found themselves entering upon a college career. Time sped by on swift-flying wings, marked off with vacations spent in their home. The brother and sister no longer needed the guiding hand of the preacher in their journey, and the old mule team was exchanged for a seat in a coach on the new railroad which ran almost to their home. Almost before they could realize the fact, four happy, glorious years had sped by, the happiest years of their young lives. They were diligent, ambitious students, winning high credits in their studies and praise from their teachers. They made many delightful acquaintances, and formed friendships destined to endure through all the years.

Now they are saying good-bye to their Alma Mater, breaking the bond of pleasant associations and delightful companionship, closing the door upon the brightest chapter in life's progress: the

chapter of their school days. They are returning home, busy with new plans for a course at the State University. Stony Jack had learned the meaning of the words 'Civil Engineer,' and was more determined than ever to acquire that title for his own. Matoaka is inspired with a purpose to fit herself for teaching, intending to return to her own people and bring to them the advantages of her college training.

The two young people lived in a dreamland, building splendid air castles. Alas, to awake from dreaming to face the stern realities of this prosaic, difficult life! But the dreams were helpful in leading them on to their destinies.

VI

The Street Meeting

The arrival of the new railroad fulfilled the prophecies of both Judge Hull and the preacher. The tide of immigration flowed heavily in. Prospectors, capitalists, speculators, adventurers, laborers, criminals, Americans and foreigners, all lured by the vision of material wealth, flocked into the newly opened country. Immense operations, both in timber and coal, were undertaken. Densely populated camps sprang up overnight, and money flowed freely.

The easy-going natives looked on in bewilderment and no little disgust at the changed order of things. A few were quick to grasp the opportunities and grew rich. The civil authorities found their duties many times multiplied, and Judge Hull, with much profane grumbling, was frequently forced to forego a pleasant fishing expedition or an exciting fox chase, while his quiet games of seven-up at the new hotel were definitely joys of the past. The preacher, at the same time, was overwhelmed with new respon-

sibilities. His soul was vexed with the spiritual destitution which he saw all about him, and the scarcity of workers to help him in relieving conditions. As he had foreseen, the country was making rapid strides in business development, but retrograding in spiritual activities. The lust for worldly gain had blinded the eyes of men to the source of true riches.

The preacher made frequent visits to the various camps in his endeavors to do the work of his Master. Entering one of the largest of these on his benevolent mission and finding no suitable place for holding services, he made use of an abandoned shed which had formerly been occupied by a saw-mill. The camp abounded in gambling dens under the guise of pool-rooms; soft drink stands dispensed the hardest of hard liquors; and places of infamy attracted multitudes who reveled in vice and iniquity. Finding that he was making no headway against the hosts of Satan, the preacher decided by a daring piece of strategy to carry the war into the enemy's stronghold. He would hold a street meeting on Sunday afternoon while hundreds of men were congregated in idleness on the Lord's Day.

He selected a position in front of the most iniquitous establishment on the one long street, run by one Sid Lee, the most notorious bad man

in the entire region. Sid Lee held the record for the community with eight notches on his gun-stock, and he was obviously eager to add more before closing his hectic career. The preacher mounted a wagon standing before Lee's place and prepared to hurl thunderbolts of gospel dynamite into the serried ranks of Satan.

Sid Lee walked up with a gun strapped to each hip, his features suffused with his most friendly smile. In his mildest tone he drawled inquiringly, "Preacher, what yer all a fixin' to pull off hyar today?"

The preacher, with considerable trepidation, as blandly replied, "We are going to hold some religious services, but I fear this noisy crowd will be too much for us."

"Wal, now," Lee replied calmly, "we sure do need some preachin' in this ongodly place, and ef yer want to do the preachin' act, by cracky, I'll see that the boys give yer a square deal an' keep on thar Sunday manners. An' say, preacher," he continued, "would yer like ter hev somebody hit the tunes fer yer an' lead the singin'?"

The preacher, not especially strong in the musical line himself, readily assented. Lee rushed into his building, reappearing almost immediately at the front windows upstairs. He flung open the sash, and led forward three or four flashily

dressed and highly painted women, shouting, "Go to it, preacher, the choir is all tuned up an' ready."

Here was an awkward surprise for the preacher. He had not anticipated just this turn of events, but before he had time to make objections, Sid Lee was at his side in the wagon, bawling out to the restless crowd which was milling about, talking and laughing boisterously, "Hey, yer fellers! Pay 'tention now! We're goin' ter hev preachin'."

A hush fell on the crowd at the sound of Lee's voice. Everyone expected some new deviltry, and every man reached for his gun.

"Yer all pay 'tention to ther preacher now," Sid continued. "Mebby he kin land some uv yer in heaven! The first galoot that butts in is going to land in ther horsepittal, er in the place the preacher tells about, tother side uv heaven!" With a nod to the preacher, Lee stepped out of the wagon, and the former, feeling that it was not a good time to draw the lines too closely between the sheep and the goats, announced a hymn and began the services.

The men caught the spirit of the occasion created by the ill-assorted combination of worshipers, and entered with enthusiasm into the singing, though in many keys and tempos. They

were no doubt spurred on by the pugnacious air of Sid Lee, who walked among them with the authority of a Puritan elder, none disputing his right to command. Before the sermon was ended, glistening eyes gazed out of many sin-hardened faces, as their owners had their thoughts carried back to the days before their wayward feet had strayed so far from the better way.

At the conclusion of a very quiet and helpful meeting, Sid Lee walked away, with the manner of a gentleman who had held a high and responsible place in an important public function.

Three weeks later, the preacher was called back to the camp to hold funeral services over the remains of Sid Lee. One of the women in the improvised choir had cut a notch in *her* gun-stock. As the preacher gazed into the calm face of the dead "bad man," he was struck with the truth that the worst of us has a streak of good mixed with the bad—a streak that links our sinful race to a common ancestry.

VII

War Clouds

Stony Jack and Matoaka returned from college at a time when the sky of the whole world was darkened by lowering war clouds surcharged with the lightnings of destruction. For two years Europe had been rocked by the earthquake shock of contending hosts. America's Ship of State was being slowly, but surely, drawn into the bloody whirlpool of strife, despite the efforts of her pilot to steer her into the calm waters of peace.

Immediately on their return, the young people spent some days visiting former friends and familiar scenes, riding horseback over the mountains. War and the certainty of America's entrance into the conflict were the chief topics of conversation everywhere. The war spirit was daily rising in intensity, and discussion became more voluble and heated. Several of Stony Jack's friends and kinsmen had already enlisted in the regular army or in the state guards, ex-

pecting soon to see active service—an expectation that was later fully realized.

Stony Jack became restless and moody as news came back from the army camps where his friends were drilling and reporting great times. His young blood was stirred to feverish activity, and he was growing more restive as each day saw the tide of war rise higher and higher.

One day at dinner when the preacher was present, Stony Jack abruptly announced his intention of enlisting. For a long time no one spoke. His mother looked at him with sudden, pained surprise, but made no comment. His decision seemed foreordained. Matoaka alone made protest. "Don't go, Stony Jack!" she cried, with a catch in her voice. "Think of all our plans for going to the University next year; of your ambition to be a civil engineer. Don't throw away all your fine chances by enlisting in the army. War may not come anyway, and then, if it shouldn't come, you would be tied down for years to an old army camp."

"No," insisted Stony Jack, stubbornly, "I'll have to go later under the draft, and I'd rather go now while I can still choose my branch of service. I'll join the Engineers and get a lot of practical experience in camp. You mustn't worry, there's no great danger in that line of service.

Our people for generations back have been loyal to the government, and have fought in every war in defense of the Flag. I'm not going to be the first traitor to our family traditions. Don't you say I am right, preacher?" he said, addressing the latter.

The preacher, thus appealed to, did not answer at once. He gazed appreciatively at the well-built, handsome, impulsive boy, alive with energy and high purpose. He was conscious, too, of the anxious eyes of Matoaka, sitting like an accused criminal awaiting her verdict. When he spoke it was with great deliberation. "Yes, my son, I do agree with you. This is going to be a tremendous conflict, which we hope will decide for all time some of the great problems of human rights and government. Life is not measured in years, but in achievements. Seldom does one have the privilege of serving so great a cause, or dying for such high ideals. Go, and may God bless you, Stony Jack!"

Unbroken silence followed this speech. Stony Jack gripped the preacher's hand, his face glowing. Matoaka slipped out quietly to a secluded corner of the orchard, where she had gone as a little girl with her childish griefs.

"When do yer figur on startin'?" was the only comment of Alonzo Whitfield.

"Tomorrow," the boy replied promptly, and followed Matoaka to the orchard, where the two spent a long hour trying to reconstruct some of their crumbling air castles.

The following day Stony Jack went to town and enlisted. A week later he was in camp with the Engineers, and the first real break was made in the family circle. Stony Jack belonged to his country.

His enlistment wrought a sudden and radical change in his mode of life. Transferred at once from a quiet country home to the bustle and turmoil of a great cantonment, where thousands of raw recruits were being whipped into shape to face the best trained army the world had ever seen, he was at first utterly bewildered. But his quick eye and keen mind helped him to adjust himself to military routine, and he began to enjoy the new life immensely.

He was most fortunate in his choice of service. The Engineering Corps was composed of a splendid group of young Americans whom Stony Jack found instantly congenial. His buddie, Bruce Malcomson, was a fine young college chap from a northern state, and the two soon became inseparable comrades.

After a few months of intensive training, orders were issued for preparations for immediate em-

barkation. The excitement was intense. Everyone was busy writing farewell letters home, shipping surplus baggage and rolling packs into the smallest possible compass. In an incredibly short time the shores of the homeland were receding and the great transport, crowded with a great, khaki-clad host, was lost to view in the vast expanse of blue waters.

Once fairly out to sea, the nights of all on board were passed in constant readiness for possible disaster, while the days were given over to scanning the horizon for any sign of the treacherous under-sea craft of the enemy. In spite of the danger, the open sea made a powerful appeal to the imagination of Stony Jack. Gazing out upon the immense expanse of restless waters, he was reminded by contrast of his own towering mountains, from whose lofty peaks he had often gazed into the blue vault stretching away beyond his vision, wondering what mysteries lay therein.

After what seemed an interminable voyage, the shores of France loomed out of the mist one morning, and the men filed quickly down the gang-plank and marched into camp, glad of the opportunity to exercise their cramped legs. The Engineers were in immediate demand, and were rushed at once to the front to assist in road building, preparatory to a smashing drive the

British planned to make against the Hindenburg Line—a drive in which the tanks were to prove their tremendous power and value in modern warfare.

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Left at home, the active-minded Matoaka could not long continue depressed over the sudden shattering of her plans. She was proud of Stony Jack, proud of his patriotic devotion to country and family traditions. Their parting had been affecting, but free from outwardly expressed signs of grief. The mountaineers are a stoical people, due perhaps to their strict adherence to the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination, taught for a hundred years by a people called Hard Shell Baptists. This doctrine holds that all things are foreordained to occur as they do, and that it is sinful to question the wisdom of God; such is the foundation of their religious belief. It is told of one mountaineer mother that she saw five stalwart sons caried home, slain in fuedal battles, and saw them laid to rest in the little family graveyard without shedding a tear. She was not callous. Her stoicism was the result of the belief that such things were foreordained to happen.

Stony Jack's letters to the home folks were full of interesting details of camp life, written always in a cheerful vein. From them Matoaka grasped

a deeper sense of the meaning of the conflict, and she grew impatient to have some part in its activities. She joined the Red Cross, and became deeply absorbed in knitting, rolling bandages and assisting in campaigns for members and money. Daily she might be seen riding to and from town on Rosewood, a powerful and spirited dark bay horse which was a gift to her from her father. She was happy in the consciousness that in her small way she was contributing to help Stony Jack carry the flag to victory.

Felix Luster, a man several years Matoaka's senior, held the honorable position of high sheriff of the county in which the Whitfields lived—a position he had secured largely through underground political wire-pulling. He was nicknamed "Hell Roaring Felix" because of his boisterous and bragging manner of speech, and since his wife's divorce of him, he had posed as the "Sheik of the Mountains." For some time this man had manifested a fondness for the company of the young war worker, and frequently made it a point to ride home with her, on the pretext that he was on the lookout for moonshiners in the wild region beyond the Whitfield farm.

Matoaka did not relish the attentions of Felix. He was illiterate, rough, boisterous and not infre-

quently under the influence of liquor. It was also hinted in many quarters that the sheriff was secretly in league with a powerful group of moonshiners and bootleggers. Although frequently on the trail of outlaws, he made no captures. However, as he was a friend of her father's and prominent in the affairs of the community, Matoaka accepted his attentions with as good grace as possible.

Matoaka's days were filled with activity and her nights with troubled dreams, as the news of great battles with their consequent heavy casualties was received with increasing frequency. She knew that Stony Jack was somewhere near the front—the exact location of which was shrouded in mystery and from which nothing ever emerged but wounded men and accounts of terrible slaughter. Of late his letters had been shorter and more infrequent.

One morning the world was electrified by news of the great drive, and the heretofore impregnable line that for so long had defied the greatest efforts of the Allied armies, broke, and the victorious hosts surged through the gap.

The Engineers were rushed forward to build new roads and lay out new trenches, and soon found themselves deep in German territory. Stony Jack and Bruce Malcomson were in the front

line, and when the smashing counter-attack came, were caught between the conflicting tides, and were forced to drop their tools, bring their revolvers into action and fight their way to freedom. The hard won territory was being slowly lost to the British as they were forced back, fighting with bulldog tenacity against increasing pressure. The two friends remained close together, fighting with cool deliberation, encouraging their comrades to hold fast. A huge shell burst directly in front of them, tearing a great hole in the ground and scattering death-dealing fragments all about. Stony Jack crumpled up and pitched forward on his face, a jagged hole in his side. Malcomson was hurled backward several yards, but was not fatally hurt. He staggered on after his retreating comrades.

Reaching a place of comparative safety, Malcomson recovered somewhat from the effects of the explosion and looked about for his comrade. He saw him lying helpless between the lines, only a short distance from the advancing Germans. Malcomson had been a great football player in college, and using his old tactics, he rushed forward, dodging behind tree trunks and crouching in shell holes, finally gaining the place where Stony Jack lay. He lifted him to his shoulders, and started on his perilous trip back. Their posi-

tion was so close to the German line that it would have been easy for the enemy to have riddled both with machine-gun bullets; but, to the credit of the commander, he ordered the guns elevated, and both sides cheered as Malcomson and his burden reached the British lines in safety.

The sands of life in Stony Jack's glass were almost run. He spoke with difficulty. "Thanks, old man. You're a real friend."

"I only did what you would have done for me," replied Malcomson with emotion.

"I wanted to send a message home," Stony Jack continued. "It might help some when the news reaches them."

"I'll do my best to get it through," Malcomson assured him. "But just now the chances look bad for all of us."

"Tell Dad and Ma I tried to be a good soldier and a good Whitfield. Tell the preacher I was glad to die for my country. Tell Matoaka I died without regret or fear, and give her this picture that I've carried all the time; it's been a lot of comfort to me."

His mind began to wander. He was back once more in old Kentucky, working with the surveyors, romping with the children, following his hounds over the mountains. He was back in school, re-living those delightful days, building

air castles again. He roused for a moment. "Tell Matoaka," he whispered, "tell Mato—" He was gone. What he wanted to tell Matoaka would have to wait until a future day.

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Three weeks later the preacher dropped into the post office and was given a letter bearing a foreign postmark. He read with blurred eyes the message that Malcomson had thoughtfully delivered to him to convey to the family. Half aloud he said, "I was not wrong in my judgment. Stony Jack lived up to my highest expectations. God bless him, and help Matoaka!"

He made his way in sorrowful haste to the Whitfield home and read to the family the tragic news. The shock rendered them speechless, bowed down under the heart-subduing finality of God's eternal decrees. Gently, consolingly, the preacher lifted up his voice in prayer, and in a few simple, earnest words he led their thoughts away from their personal grief and loss, to the Heavenly Father, who, to save a world from ruin, sacrificed his only begotten Son.

Long into the night Matoaka sat in her room keeping a tearless, sleepless vigil, reviewing the vanished years, faded dreams and blasted hopes she and Stony Jack had shared together. Henceforth, she must dream and plan alone.

VIII

In France

One morning at breakfast about a week after the news of Stony Jack's death was received, Matoaka announced her intention of going to France as a nurse. No serious objections were raised. As in the case of Stony Jack's enlistment, the matter was accepted as being the Lord's will. Only the sheriff entered a protest when he heard of it. "It's no place and work for a young girl," he declared with emphasis. "Yer dad had ort to put his foot down and stop it. He's done 'nough and made a big donation already in a war that don't concern us Americans."

"The trouble is," said Matoaka, bitterly scornful, "that so many self-styled Americans are cowards and slackers that some must make a double contribution."

Felix, who was a lukewarm patriot and critical of the war program, subsided, and soon took his departure.

Rapid preparations were made and in a brief time Matoaka found herself in Washington, a

part of a swirling sea of marching soldiers, gaily uniformed officers, war workers, statesmen, cheap politicians, "Dollar-a-Year" men, grafters, soft-snap seekers, spies, and foreign diplomats. She pushed through the surging tide of humanity to the Red Cross headquarters, and began the task of training for overseas service.

Weeks later she was aboard a great transport, following the brave example of Stony Jack, her mind crowded with thoughts of the wonderful events through which she had been passing, and of the even more stirring events which undoubtedly awaited her on the other side. How short the time since Stony Jack had sailed these same danger-filled seas, and how brief but glorious his career! Would the fates be more kind to her?

Matoaka thoroughly enjoyed the voyage. Several of the passengers were from her own state, bound on the same mission as she, and she made a number of agreeable acquaintances. No attacks were made by the enemy on the transport, and one bright morning she anchored in friendly waters.

Three days later Matoaka, with several other nurses, were conveyed to an immense white building crowded with cots, each cot occupied by a sick or wounded American, and she was brought face to face with the dreadful realities

of war. She entered immediately upon her duties and for many days was too busy and tired to even think of home-sickness. Her one thought was to relieve the sufferings of the constant stream of victims broken by the hideous war, as they passed daily through the crowded wards. The hospital was located well up to the front, and the boom of big guns and whir of airplanes supplied a continuous accompaniment to Matoaka's days. Her nerves were keyed to high tension, but she never faltered. She was there to aid Stony Jack's comrades in winning the war.

One morning as she came on duty, the doctor said to her, "There is a young chap in your section who was brought in during the night. He's in a bad way, with a bullet through his left lung, and has a bare chance for his life. But his commander sent word to do our best, or a little better for him, as he did not want to lose many such fellows. This chap has already been decorated for bravery, and if he lives will receive a Captain's commission for his last exploit. Make him as comfortable as possible and report any change in his condition. We want to save every one we can of these brave boys who are throwing themselves into this conflict with such fine enthusiasm."

The wounded man was lying on his back in a

semi-conscious state, moaning and talking incoherently, moving his head restlessly. Matoaka bathed his tanned face and brushed back the dark locks that had a tendency to curl about his forehead. His face was handsome, though drawn and pale from suffering and loss of blood. What the doctor had told her made her more than ordinarily anxious that this particular patient should recover, and she was constant in her attentions, watching eagerly for returning consciousness.

She was called from his side for a few moments by another patient and when she returned he was gazing at her in a somewhat dazed but pleased way. Slowly he opened his lips and as slowly and softly, but audibly, spoke the one word, "Ma—toak—a!"

"Why!" she exclaimed in bewilderment, "how do you know my name?"

"That's what Stony Jack called you. I have your picture. He gave it to me to give you if I ever got back," explained the wounded man. "That was the last word he tried to speak. I was Stony Jack's buddie!"

The exertion of speaking proved too much for the patient, and he lapsed into unconsciousness again. Matoaka, in great alarm, called the doctor. He must not die now. Stony Jack's buddie

must live. Stony Jack had written so many fine things about his chum, had loved him so, that she must save his life for Stony Jack's sake. She wanted so much to hear more of her brother's last days on earth from the one man who could tell her of the closing scene. Malcomson revived in a few moments, but it was a long time before he was able to talk to her upon the topic nearest her heart.

When he was stronger he gave her the picture he had taken from the hands of her dying brother. It was stained with several dark blots —Stony Jack's blood; and fresher splotches— Malcomson's blood, splashed there when the machine-gun bullet passed so near his heart. She gazed at the picture for a long time with tear-dimmed eyes, then kissed it reverently.

As the days slipped by, Malcomson's returning strength gave assurance of his recovery. Matoaka read to him and wrote letters to his people, and learned much from his lips concerning Stony Jack that increased her deep pride in her brother. During the weeks that followed, the two young people so strangely brought together amid the wreckage of war, became deeply attached to each other, each beholding in the other a tie that linked them with a dear memory.

But while Malcomson was making rapid

progress toward recovery, the nerve-breaking pace of war-time nursing was telling on the health of Matoaka. She grew thin and began to droop perceptibly. The doctors observed her condition, and one morning the head nurse came to her, saying, "My dear, the doctors have prescribed rest and a change of work for you. You are to go away for several weeks, possibly months."

"But I don't want to go away," objected Matoaka, "I want to go on with my work here. I don't need a rest." The idea of separation from Malcomson was unthinkable.

"Yes, but orders are orders," replied her superior, "and all good soldiers obey. Furthermore," she added with a roguish smile, "when you hear the orders read you will decide that you really couldn't stay here. You have been one of our most faithful and competent nurses; bringing young Malcomson back from the brink of the grave was only one of the splendid things you've accomplished, and the doctors all feel that you have earned not only a rest, but a vacation in the nature of a promotion. We are planning to send a large company of convalescent men, including Malcomson, to Southern France for the winter, hoping that the change will benefit them. You are commissioned to take full charge of the

movement and to look after the welfare of the entire group."

"You are a dear," cried Matoaka with feeling, "to plan all this for me. I never can thank you enough!"

"No," said the nurse, "it's a matter of duty. Stony Jack's buddie needs Stony Jack's sister to bring him back to health and our country's service."

The journey south was a round of delight, traveling through quaint villages, wonderful old cities, fertile fields and well-kept vineyards, cheered on by the grateful French people, who were voluble in their expressions of appreciation of the help of the Americans in their hour of need. The trip supplied an agreeable change from the bare walls and crowded wards of the hospital, offering instead the balmy sea breezes and warm sunshine of the southland.

Wounds healed rapidly, and the tinge of returning health appeared on pallid cheeks, while shattered nerves and battered bodies came slowly but surely back to normal. Malcomson and Matoaka spent many happy hours together in the beautiful parks, enjoying the music of the bands, or strolling down the leafy avenues surrounded by laughing, joyous children, safe from the horrors of a savage horde of invaders.

In the Spring came the welcome orders to sail for home. Hearts thrilled with joy at the thought of meeting loved ones again, far from the carnage and ruins wrought by the ravages of war. To Malcomson and Matoaka the joy of returning was tinged with feelings of sadness, for separation when they reached New York City was inevitable. There had been no exchange of vows between them. Malcomson wished to form some definite plans for the future, and to give them both an opportunity to adjust themselves to the new conditions which must surely follow the years of confusion through which they had passed before asking Matoaka to share his fortunes. But both felt that an over-ruling Providence had, in its own mysterious way, linked their lives together. And Matoaka feeling this, was content to wait in happy, hopeful expectation.

Before sailing, a Belgian officer, whom Matoaka had nursed through a critical illness, presented her with a splendid young police dog that had been superbly trained for war duty. She was delighted with the gift and named the dog "Major" in honor of the donor.

The return voyage was one of unalloyed happiness. The great steamer plowed through placid waters unruffled by a single storm, beneath a serene blue sky, fanned by soft breezes. All

hearts were light as each turn of the propeller brought them nearer home. Malcomson, in his Captain's uniform now, and Matoaka spent blissful hours promenading the wide decks or sitting in steamer chairs listening to the orchestra accompanied by the swish of the waves against the prow of the vessel.

Malcomson's father met them when they landed and personally thanked Matoaka for the great part she had had in restoring his son to him well and strong. "He has written us all about it," he told her, "and you must come and visit us some time and receive the thanks of his mother and sister. We shall always owe you a debt of gratitude which is greater than we can ever possibly pay."

Matoaka, discounting her responsibility for Malcomson's recovery, thanked him for the invitation, hoping that it would be possible for her to accept it at some not-too-distant date. Then they separated, the girl going south and the men to the northwest, but two of the hearts, at least, were filled with the wonderful visions of things beyond the horizon of the present that keeps humanity ever pressing forward.

IX

King of the Moonshiners

Alonzo Whitfield and his son, Carlo, met Matoaka at the station on her return home. She was amazed at the rapid growth of the little village into a busy, thriving city with paved streets, electric lights, beautiful modern homes and business blocks occupied by modern, well-appointed stores. Her brother, about fourteen years of age, appeared much taller than as she remembered him and bore a striking resemblance to Stony Jack. She observed with a pang of sadness that her father's hair had grown gray, that his shoulders sagged, and his whole appearance was thin and careworn. His smile of greeting had a pathetic twist that tugged at her heartstrings.

On the way home Matoaka chattered gaily, asking all manner of questions about the people and places connected with her life before she left for France. Her mother met her with a quiet, deeply glad expression in her eyes and kissed her affectionately. She, too, had altered. Her luxuriant brown hair was streaked with grey, her

step had lost much of its elasticity, and she looked careworn and sad. Matoaka attributed these sad changes to grief over the loss of Stony Jack.

As Matoaka went through the house and yard, peeping into all the old familiar corners, she was struck with the dilapidated, rundown appearance of everything about the place. Suddenly the thought swept over her like a huge sea-billow—Stony Jack was not there, never would be again—and she buried her face in her arms and wept with unrestrained grief.

About sunset, as she came out on the front porch, she observed her father talking with several ill-clad, evil-looking characters at the side gate. Her mother answered her question as to their business evasively, but when she had gone back into the kitchen Carlo slipped up behind Matoaka and whispered, "Moonshiners!"

"What are they after, Carlo?"

"Tryin' to git Dad to jine 'em. They say there's big money in it."

"But surely," Matoaka protested, "father won't listen to them or have anything to do with them! He doesn't need their money."

"Sure he does," replied Carlo. "Dad, he's busted, an' the farm's mortgaged, an' we're pore again!"

"Why, Carlo, what do you mean?" Matoaka

demanded. "What has happened? Aren't the mines paying?"

"Wal, yer see," responded Carlo, "Dad, he bought a sight of wildcat oil stocks from some slick-tongued furiners, an' they sure skinned him. Dad, he's sore on most everybody, an' says they're all crooks, an' he says by hokey, he might as well git his'n thataway as the rest of 'em. He's got awful cross an' mean to Ma an' us kids, an' Ma, she cries a heap when dad's gone."

Matoaka was too shocked and sick at heart to ask further questions. She decided to wait and talk matters over with her father when he came in.

After the men left, Whitfield walked slowly up to the porch and wearily seated himself in the old hickory chair. Matoaka softly approached him, and placing her arms about his shoulders, kissed each of his weather-beaten cheeks. He looked up at her, surprised but pleased. "Tell me, father," she began, "what has happened? You are in trouble. I must know so I can help you and repay you for all you have done for me."

He sat silent for a moment, and then replied bitterly, "I'm most 'shamed ter tell yer, how I let a passel of slick strangers clean me out. I made bad investments, an' if I can't make a raise of a pile of money soon, we're tetotally ruint.

Sheriff Luster's got a mortgage plastered all over the place. Lately he's bin pushin' me fer settlement. I'm 'feared he'll close me out. Thar 'pears to be only one quick way to make money these days," he continued half defiantly.

"But father, surely you don't mean to join those outlaws in their evil ways?" questioned Matoaka.

"Why not? Everybody is taking short cuts to riches; why not me?"

"But father, short cuts don't bring success. They may bring temporary gain, but they inevitably end in disappointment, failure and shame. Look at the German people, who thought they would take the short cut to Paris, and see where they are now. Brace up, father! You are discouraged and blue. One failure shouldn't defeat you. I have my profession, and surely Mr. Luster can be persuaded to give us time, and you and I together will dig out from under this burden, honestly and honorably. And remember also that we must be loyal to our government just as much in time of peace as in time of war. Stony Jack and more than fifty thousand of his brave comrades sacrificed everything in defense of justice and human rights, and we must keep faith with them. The moonshiners, bootleggers and their miserable patrons are just as much the enemies

of our country as the Huns, for whose defeat so many fine young men died."

"Mebby yer right, child, mebby yer right," said her father thoughtfully, and went into the house. Matoaka, depressed and sad, retired to her room.

An hour later Alonzo Whitfield might have been seen gliding silently through the woods toward an abandoned old cabin in an isolated corner of his farm. There he met his visitors of the earlier hours of the evening.

"Yer late, 'Lonzo," said Andy Jake Blevans. "Did the gal try to keep yer from comin'?"

"We talked quite a spell," said Alonzo, not inclined to discuss the subject.

"Well, don't let her talk yer out of jinin' us. A helluva lot of them folks what went across the big pond come back with big talk, but I say, git the money while the gittin's good, law er no law," asserted Andy Jake defiantly. "Besides, 'Lonzo," he continued, "we sure need yer to help us pull the big deals with the operators an' pollyticians. We got a safe place down hyar where we can defy all the rev'noos to find us. Why, ole Gabriel, what the preacher talks 'bout, when he blows the big horn fer thatare Resrection Day, won't even be able to find us. An' we'll hev a big lot on hand fer the crowd what the preacher says hev bin drinkin' nothin' but

liquid fire fer a million years. I cal'late we'll make a killin' then—that is if Sheriff Felix don't butt in an' want too big a rake-off."

"Aw, Andy Jake," remonstrated Willie Jim Crockett, "shet up! Quit a'slanderin' our noble Sheriff. When he gits to be 'Lonzo's son-in-law an' we 'lect 'Lonzo chief of our clan, I figur we'll purty nigh run this county as fer as the refreshments an' pollyticks is consarned."

A loud laugh greeted this remark, which Alonzo interrupted by saying, "Leave off the question of wimmen and matrimony, boys."

"Ain't that the gospel truth!" agreed Andy Jake. "I say, stick to men an' moonshine. Wimmen an' likker don't mix no more than dark an' daylight."

"Wal, git down to work," urged Alonzo. "The night's gettin' along. We must make this run of corn juice 'fore day."

Without further delay, Andy Jake raised a concealed trapdoor in a corner of the cabin floor, and the six men, preceded by Alonzo carrying a smoking and ill smelling lantern, descended into what proved to be the entrance to an underground passage leading into a large cavern. The descent was abrupt for a hundred yards or more, the passage narrow and winding. It terminated in a large room almost twenty feet wide, with a roof

high enough to permit a tall man to stand erect. The floor was comparatively dry, but cluttered with broken rocks and protruding stalagmites.

From this room a short passage led into another immense room with a vaulted ceiling decorated with delicately beautiful stalactites, which, when lighted by the rays from the lantern, shown and sparkled as though composed of millions of precious stones. The floor of this room was smooth and level over a wide surface.

Here was located a six hundred gallon still and two smaller ones, complete with all necessary equipment. A small stream of water ran across one side of the room, affording a convenient means of disposing of the refuse from the stills, and providing a sufficient supply of water for their operation. By an ingenious arrangement a line of stove-pipe had been led up through the passage into the chimney of the cabin, which had its outlet in the heavy foliage of a wide-spreading chestnut tree, so that smoke issuing from it could seldom be seen by day and never by night. No safer place could have been found anywhere for the illegal manufacture of whiskey. Bags of corn meal, dried peaches, raisins and sugar were piled in one corner. Also several boxes of concentrated lye to give the necessary

'kick' to the product. Tubs of mash ready for the run stood near the stills.

The men threw off their coats and began working steadily, without loss of time in conversation. Before morning they had a large quantity of liquor ready for distribution by the bootleggers. This band did not sell the liquor direct. It was safer and more profitable to 'moonshine' and sell through agents.

* * * * * * * *

Early next morning Matoaka was up helping with the preparation of breakfast, ready for an early start to town to apply for a nursing position in the local hospital, a small but well-conducted private institution which had proved a blessing to the community where so many men were almost daily injured in the mines, or wounded in the numerous brawls and feuds that arose among the more lawless elements. She noticed that her father ate almost nothing and looked weary and haggard, and had little to say as she discussed her plans for the future. As Carlo passed her at the dining-room door, he gave her a knowing wink and muttered, "Moonshiners."

Riding into town, Matoaka dismounted near the Court House, and the first to greet her was the sheriff, Felix Luster. "Wal, now," he

boomed in a voice like a huge bullfrog, "it sure is a sight fur bad eyes to see you home again. An' how good you look! We all thought you'd never come back. Was 'feared mebby you'd marry one of them gold-laced furrin officers. They sure treated you good. Reckon you didn't leave no sweethearts over there? 'Cause we figur on keepin' all our nice, good lookin' girls at home to adorn our own happy firesides."

Matoaka made no reply to his jocularity, but expressed her thanks for his good wishes and spoke of her desire to secure a position where she might be able to aid her father in paying his debts.

"Wal, now," he replied, "yer dad sure did git balled up dickerin' with them strangers. I warned him, but he was jest nat'rly hell-bent on beatin' Rockyfeller in the oil game. When they strung 'im I stepped in an' saved the farm. I tell him to take his time to pay up, but he keeps a'worryin' an' talkin' 'bout moonshinin' an' easy money, an' sich fool things to git rich quick. But I tell him to lay off that stuff. I'd hate to haf to raid his place. I have 'nough trouble with these low-down, ten-gallon shiners 'thout heven to bring reproach on our leadin' citizens. I sure am glad to see yer, Matoaka; yer lookin' swell in them new clothes. Wal, so long," he called after her as she hastened

away. "I'll be seeing you soon at yer house an' we'll talk to yer dad 'bout that mortgage an' other things."

She was glad to escape the man's loud talk and fulsome praise. His presence gave her an uncomfortable sensation, something akin to the feelings of a young deer sensing the presence of an unseen panther.

At the hospital Doctor Johnson gave her a hearty welcome, and was more than pleased to learn that her services were available. "We thought after your experiences in France you would never want to see the inside of a hospital again," he said.

Matoaka explained to him her desire to be of financial aid to her parents, and practical arrangements were soon settled to their mutual satisfaction.

Her duties were not especially hard, her associations with the hospital staff agreeable, and in a few days after taking up her professional duties she found herself slipping into the quiet routine of her home life once more. She rode Rosewood to and from the hospital for the sake of exercise and to be at home nights with her family.

It was as she was riding home one evening about two weeks later that she received a long letter from Bruce Malcomson. He told of his

safe arrival home, of the joy of being with loved ones again. Then he added,

And now I have a little surprise for you. I have laid aside my uniform, but am still in the service of my good old Uncle Samuel. I have enlisted in government service as a secret agent. There is an appalling amount of lawlessness rampant, following the great upheaval of the war. Our country today is in as great peril—perhaps greater—from internal foes, as she was from foreign invaders at the very pinnacle of Germany's power. I feel that I can do my nation no higher service than to dedicate myself anew to the defense of constitutional government and respect for law. While most of our public officials are loyal Americans, far too many are in league with the forces of disintegration that seek to undermine the very foundations of our public life.

I have been assigned to the mountain district of your state and will operate as an agent for large coal corporations. I hope to see you in the near future and renew our former good-fellowship.

Faithfully yours,

Bruce Malcomson.

Matoaka rode slowly, her mind absorbed in the contents of the letter she had received, and was unconscious of an approaching horseman until the loud voice of the sheriff surprised her as he reined up his horse at her side. Blushingly, Matoaka returned his greeting, and deftly tucked the letter in the bosom of her blouse.

"So," he said, laughing loudly, "my fears of a furriner sweetheart are proved rite 'fore my eyes. Better 'fess up afore I use my authority to search you as a 'spicious character."

"Surely a lone woman on the public highway is safe from harm in company with the high sheriff of the county," protested Matoaka in mock humility.

"Oh, sure, yer always safe with me," said Felix. "I'd be willin' to be yer pertecter ferever. But," he continued, "I'm agin the furriners. I don't want them comin' in an' tellin' us how to run the country an' a'carryin' off all our purty girls. These reven'oo men, fer instance, with their high notions, comin' in here an' actin' like we all was lawbreakers, an' a stirrin' up trouble among neighbors."

"But, Mr. Luster," Matoaka remonstrated, "don't you think the government is interested in law enforcement, and don't these men assist you in suppressing crime?"

"Oh, sure they do. But you can't be *too* tight on the bootleggers. Our big coal men hev to keep their men satisfied, an' coal diggers ain't satisfied 'thout their likker. They keep running from camp to camp, and spend so much time huntin' likker they don't dig no coal. It hurts business. The big coal men pay most of the taxes an' ort to have some pertection."

"So you think, then, that mining is more important than obedience to law, and that paying taxes entitles corporations to set aside the law when self-interest dictates such a course?"

"Aw! You wimmen can't see into this business of pollyticks. It's a tuff question, an' ort to be left in the hands of men, while wimmen 'tend to home."

"Yes, but the women and children are the chief sufferers from the loose way in which the laws are administered, and they have a right to take an active part in securing equal justice," Matoaka replied with some heat.

They had reached her gate, and Felix, feeling somehow that he was making a lame defense of his position, excused himself on the pretext of going up into the mountains in quest of moonshiners.

"I wish you success, Mr. Luster, in your endeavors to enforce the law against all offenders,

high or low," she called after him as he rode away.

Alonzo was not home when Matoaka returned. He had gone away early to buy some calves at the head of the valley, and might not return until late. The girl sat on the porch with her mother until bedtime, speculating on the reasons for Alonzo Whitfield's prolonged delay in returning. Carlo came close to her side and whispered in her ear the same word he had uttered that morning, "Moonshiners!"

She went to bed troubled and perplexed. She had a feeling that in some way her father was mixed up in the illicit liquor traffic, that the sheriff, in spite of his boasting, was shielding the bootleggers and moonshiners, and that he had some ulterior motive in lending money to her father; this last possibility she was particularly loath to dwell upon.

She feared that Malcomson's arrival would complicate matters. Revenue men were not popular in the mountains. The people as a class resented what they regarded a meddlesome interference in their liberties. She could see that a clash might come at any time between Malcomson and the sheriff; and that her father would of necessity side with the sheriff, thus leaving her the only friend Malcomson would have in a

hostile country. She was not sure that she was pleased over the prospect of his coming. Dark clouds were gathering about her, and she retired to her room to spend a restless, almost sleepless, night.

Toward morning she heard the sound of horses' hoofs on the road, and peeping through the curtains of her window saw her father ride in at the gate. She was sure she also saw the sheriff riding off toward town. All these circumstances combined to make her even more than ever apprehensive.

X

Malcomson Visits Matoaka

Several days after the events described in the previous chapter, as Matoaka was preparing to go home at the close of her day's work, she heard a well-known voice asking for her in the little office of the hospital. She hurried to greet the inquirer, and she and Malcomson were soon chatting and laughing like two children, long separated. An hour was spent in discussing their adventures since last they had met, and recalling some of their mutual experiences in France. Loathe to terminate an occasion so delightful to both, Matoaka was forced to leave for home before night should overtake her, but Malcomson would not let her go until she promised to see him on the following day.

"You must come out and visit our home," she urged cordially. "Father and Mother will both be so pleased to meet Stony Jack's buddy. Sunday is my day off duty," she continued. "Come out then and sample our Kentucky hospitality."

He manifested the keenest delight over the

prospect of meeting her in her own home and renewing the friendship of former days.

Bright and early on the following Sunday morning he was on the way, having secured a saddle horse at the livery stable. He rode slowly, enjoying the quiet of a Sabbath in the country, appreciating the majestic grandeur of the mountains and the beauty of the low-lying valleys. His mind was busy reviewing the steps in his career which had finally brought him as a government agent into the very heart of the ancient haunts of the moonshiners.

His meditations were suddenly and rudely interrupted by the appearance of three roughly dressed, unshaven mountaineers, all heavily armed. They seemed to have dropped from the sky or risen out of the ground, so unheralded had been their advent. The place was a secluded spot where the road cut through a heavy body of timber, leaving a dense forest of trees and brush on either side. Malcomson was wholly unprepared for trouble, not having thought it worth while to go armed so near town on Sunday morning. However, he manifested no apparent alarm as the men blocked his progress, one of them seizing his horse by the bridle.

"Mornin', stranger!" drawled the leader. "Be yer travelin' er jest goin' somewhar?"

"Good morning, gentlemen," returned Malcomson, courteously. "I am going out to Mr. Whitfield's farm. That is both traveling and going somewhere. And now, if you will be kind enough to release my horse," he continued, "I will be getting on."

"Not so fast, stranger, not so fast," admonished the other. "We all want to ax yer a few questions fust. Be yer a friend of 'Lonzo's?"

"I am a friend of Miss Whitfield's," answered Malcomson patiently.

"Aw yes, goin' sparkin', I reckon."

"I was invited out for the day."

"What mout be yer bizness, stranger, in these parts?"

Malcomson was angered by the man's impudence, but realizing the relative weakness of his position, he concluded that, as they had the advantage of him, it would be the better part of valor to treat them courteously. "I am representing some northern coal buyers," he replied.

"Yer ain't representin' no rev'noos, be yer?" queried the mountaineer. "A lot of 'em fellers has been nosin' an' prowlin' about these parts, meddlin' in other folkses' bizness, an' we figur on knowin' whar strangers is gwine an' what thar gwine after. How'd yer come to know Matoaka, 'Lonzo's gal, stranger?"

"I met her in France," was the quiet reply.

"Oh, hell! Be yer Stony Jack's buddy, stranger?"

"I was," said Malcomson, "before he was killed."

"Put 'er thar, pardner," said the man, extending his hand. "I sure want to shake with the man what carried Stony Jack offen the field with big shells bustin' an' machine-gun bullets flien 'til yer couldn't see yer han' before yer. We heard 'bout it all from 'Lonzo. My name's Abe Moses, an' these har gentlemens is Ike Linkenhoker and Andy Jake Blevins. We sure are proud ter meet Stony Jack's buddy. Yer welcome to our country."

"I am delighted to know you, gentlemen," said Malcomson, "and proud to be in the company of Moses, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all at the same time, although you seem to be a long way from your old home."

"Aw, no, pardner, we ain't fur from home. We live t'other side the ridge, over thar. We was raised in these parts."

"Well, now," said Malcomson, amused over the turn of events, "if you will permit me, I will ride on. I have an engagement for dinner."

"Not atall, not atall, pardner," said Moses. "This country is dangerous fer strangers, armed

or unarmed. Some fool moonshiner mout take yer fur a rev'noo an' plug yer. We alus sees that strangers git whar they says thar gwine an' 'tend to the bizness they say thar gwine to do. Ike an' Andy Jake will go up the road a spell with yer fur pertection. Good day, pardner. I sure am proud ter meet yer. Hope we meet again!" And Abraham Moses disappeared in the brush as completely and mysteriously as he had come.

Ike and Andy Jake walked ahead of Malcomson without speaking until they came in sight of Whitfields' home. Then, pointing out the place, they said, "Thar's whar yer gwine, pardner. Wish yer luck in sparkin'!" And they, too, vanished into the bushes.

Malcomson indulged in a hearty laugh as he rode on, as the humorous side of the incident dawned more fully upon him. He could clearly see the real motive behind the thinly veiled concern these men had for his safety. He also realized how well the lawless class was organized and how hard it would be to break through the cordon of guards and spies to locate their strongholds. The encounter was a lesson in the task which lay before him; in dealing with a foe more cunning, cool, desperate and keen-witted than he had met even on the German front. He had undertaken a job that was a challenge to his

utmost skill and courage; but he faced the facts without misgivings or regrets for the choice he had made. He reached the Whitfield gate and dismounted, unaware that the eyes of Ike and Andy Jake had followed him closely from the thicket in which they were hiding.

Matoaka greeted him hospitably and complimented him on how well he was looking—better than when they had parted in New York.

"Yes," he replied, "I am feeling fit in every way. I got such fine care and attention while in the hospital that there is not a single trace of any ill effects from my wound. I only have my discharge and a scar to show that I had any part in the great war."

"And a medal and a commission," added Matoaka proudly. "And the eternal gratitude of all Stony Jack's friends."

"Yes," he replied, thinking of his morning's experience, "I have already received some substantial tokens of that! I also have the memory of several glorious months in hospital and convalescent camp," he added. "One could almost wish to be shot again just for the pleasure of being nursed back to life and health."

"No! No!" cried Matoaka, "Never wish for anything so terrible. I have seen enough of war and carnage and suffering to do me for a life-

time. Let us hope and pray and work for universal, lasting peace."

"But," objected Malcomson, "it appears that there must be many more battles fought with the foes of law and justice right here in this country, and perhaps much blood shed before that can be."

Malcomson was delighted to meet the Whitfield family and did full justice to the good home cooking of "Ma." Alonzo tried to be agreeable, but was ill at ease when the two sat on the porch while Matoaka assisted her mother in the kitchen.

Alonzo discussed politics and business affairs in a general way, giving Malcomson some information on certain coal properties that might be bought on good terms. But upon the subject of lawlessness and moonshining, he "allowed that it was not half as bad as the papers reported or as the revenue men made out." He considered that the authorities were acting from purely selfish motives to give the country a bad name.

After dinner, Malcomson and Matoaka strolled through the orchard and sat under the shade of the big trees, discussing their future until the gathering shadows reminded them that it was time for Malcomson to return to town. He rode back, wondering if he would meet his friends

of the morning or any of their ilk. But the road seemed to be deserted and silent all the way.

He had convinced the moonshiners that they need not fear him. He was Stony Jack's buddy. How soon would they discover that they had guessed wrong, and that the mild mannered, soft spoken ex-soldier would prove himself more than a match for them in a contest of wits and daring, and in first "getting the drop" on his adversaries? The name of Malcomson was one which would eventually strike terror to hearts that had never before felt fear.

XI

The Sheriff Stages a Raid

Moonshining and bootlegging had become so profitable in the mountains during the boom days when new camps were being established and the population rapidly increasing, and those engaging in the traffic had grown so bold and defiant, that conditions soon became intolerable. Law-abiding citizens waxed indignant and openly charged the sheriff with complicity in lawlessness because of his failure to make any adequate efforts to suppress open and notorious crime. The preacher thundered from his pulpit the anathemas of heaven against all who engaged in, or connived at, law-breaking, or any who disregarded official responsibility.

Election time was approaching, and the sheriff and his party felt it incumbent upon them to do something to allay public suspicion and prove their loyalty. Orders were issued by the sheriff to all his deputies to be vigilant in the search for and arrest of all suspicious characters, and Felix, in self-vindication, laid plans for a sweep-

ing raid of the region said to be the center of moonshine operations. Some thought the plans for this raid were far too elaborate and open to prove really effective.

Malcomson was frequently absent from town on unexplained visits. His departure invariably coincided with the arrival of strangers in town: sometimes it was a capitalist looking over business prospects; sometimes a laborer seeking work; and once it was an anxious father looking for a lost boy. In these guises Malcomson investigated rumors of an immense moonshine operation somewhere to the north of the Whitfield neighborhood. It was this region that the sheriff had planned to raid.

Disguised as a miner out squirrel hunting, Malcomson was carefully prospecting for signs of the exact location of the still. For several days he made no progress, although he saw evidence of activity along numerous trails. Once he caught a glimpse of a mountaineer, moving silent as a shadow through the bushes and swiftly disappearing from view. He heard a gun fired from a ridge above him and an answering gun in the distance, and knew that all about him were desperate characters, plying their wicked trade, and that his life would pay the forfeit if he was

discovered trespassing on their domain; but he pressed on unafraid and determined.

When almost ready to abandon the search for lack of proof, he caught the familiar odor of sour mash, indicating the near presence of a still. Moving cautiously through the bushes, he came upon a small stream flowing out of the side of the mountain. This stream was highly impregnated with the refuse from a still.

Malcomson was greatly pleased with the find, believing that he was on the brink of a real discovery. Noting the direction from which the stream came, he went up the mountainside for more than a mile looking for its source. He came to the old cabin, located on the Whitfield farm, and noting fresh tracks about the place, entered the sagging door. Nothing was visible except an old bedstead, a broken chair, and a pile of dirty straw in the corner. He was on the point of leaving when he heard voices outside, and looking through the broken window, saw six men approaching. To his amazement he saw that they were led by Whitfield.

He was trapped. He would of course be totally unable to satisfactorily explain his presence in the cabin, and his disguise could not possibly conceal his real identity from their keen eyes. Flight was impossible; to remain meant death.

There was no possible pretext for starting a fight, and yet he well knew the penalty which must be paid by a spy. In desperation he searched about for an avenue of escape. He caught sight of a rude ladder leading into a rickety loft. He scaled it with a quick spring and flattened himself against the planks just as the men entered. The gathering twilight helped to throw his hiding place into obscurity.

The party included Malcomson's three friends whom he had met on his way to the Whitfield farm, and the loft was so low that he could easily have reached down and touched them. He could not refrain from smiling as he thought what a sensation he would create by dropping into their midst, saying, "Strangers, be yer travelin' er jest gwine somewhar?"

The smile gave place to astonishment as he heard Abe Moses say, "Ike, light yer lantern. We better git down an' fire up before the sheriff gits hyar." With a kick, he pushed the straw from the corner and lifted a trap door.

From his position Malcomson could look down into the opening which led to the cavern. His heart leaped. He had discovered the secret place of the clan's mysterious operations. The men swung themselves into the opening, led by

Alonzo with the lantern, and disappeared around a turn in the passage.

It was now quite dark, and Malcomson decided to see all he could and get away before the arrival of the sheriff. He was puzzled to know just what the sheriff's visit might mean. Quickly descending from the loft, he lowered himself into the opening and, like a panther pursuing its prey, glided silently down the passage. He reached the entrance to the large room, where he had an unobstructed view of all that transpired inside and could hear all that was said by the men. They were talking as they fired up.

"'Pears like it's 'bout time for Hell-Roaring Felix to show up," said Abe.

"Yep," concurred Andy Jake. "Mebby he's plannin' his big raid. Better be keerful, 'Lonzo, he might nab us."

The men gave a low chuckle of appreciation at this remark.

"Don't you be 'feared of Felix nabbin' 'Lonzo," said Ike. "He's fixin' to nab 'Lonzo's gal."

Again the men chuckled.

"Go on, Ike," said Lige Heath, "Felix ain't goin' ter nab 'Lonzo, nur his gal either, 'til he nabs that smart talkin' feller that's shinin' round 'Lonzo's house. Hell-Roaring Felix ain't got no show with him in the way."

Again they laughed, this time loudly.

"Shet up, boys!" commanded Alonzo, "and git to work."

Malcomson was meditating retreat when he heard voices and footsteps in the cabin above. Again he was trapped. It was the sheriff and a deputy about to enter the trap door.

The passage was narrow, affording no place of concealment. The room in front was too well lighted to offer protection. There were at least eight against one—all Malcomson's enemies except Alonzo, and under the law of the moonshiners Alonzo could not shield a spy caught red-handed. Malcomson was an uninvited guest and he knew the consequences if he were discovered.

Directly in front of him and above his head he noticed a projection of shelving rock. This shelf offered space enough to conceal his body, if he could reach it. Placing his hands on the ledge and his foot on a projection at the side, he swung out of sight just as the sheriff came into view.

In the darkness at the edge of the shelving rock nearest the room, Malcomson noticed something move. Cautiously he shot the rays of his pocket flashlight into the corner, revealing a large copperhead snake poised ready to strike.

The light so startled the reptile that it threw itself back and fell, writhing, upon the shoulders of the sheriff just as he entered the room. With a scream of terror, he threw it off and rushed into the presence of the moonshiners, cursing them for keeping such dangerous pets about. The sheriff's companion made short work of the deadly reptile.

"Take a drink, Felix," urged Abe. "Yer nerves is shaky. Yer jest in time to see the big run-off, an' this is the real stuff. None of yer coffin varnish ye git from the bootleggers. No concentrated lye—jest pure corn juice. We're fixin' some real likker fur thatar raid, Felix."

"Boys," observed the sheriff, recovering from his fright under the influence of several drinks, "ain't yer all a little keerless in havin' no lookout above?"

"No," boasted Alonzo, "we're safe here. A fox couldn't find this hole."

"Don't be too sure, boys!" warned the sheriff. "'Pears to me like that coal buyer's makin' some 'spicious steps lately."

A loud shout, which nettled the sheriff, greeted this remark.

"To be shore the sheriff's gittin' 'spicious," cried Andy Jake. "He ort to be 'spicious. But s'long as that feller don't horn in on our game

an' sticks to sparkin', we'uns ain't goin' to take no sides. That's yer funeral, Felix."

"Yep, sheriff," added Lige Heath, "yer better hev a lookout on the road to 'Lonzo's house. Somebody's keepin' that trail hot these days."

"Look here, sheriff," interposed Alonzo, "when does this raid come off yer advertisin' so big?"

"Tomorrow night," replied the sheriff, "and we want to pull a big one. Have a small still an' several gallons of good whiskey at the big cliff near the creek. Get several of the boys to come with high-power guns, but tell 'em to shoot high. We want lots of noise."

After a few more drinks and more talk, the sheriff and his deputy left.

"Now, boys," said Whitfield, "git busy an' tote the refreshments fur the sheriff's party up into the cabin, an' jug the rest fur the bootleggers. It's most daylight."

The work completed, Alonzo detailed three men to remain in the cave until morning and then carry the liquor to the appointed place. The rest went home to prepare for the big raid on the following night.

Malcomson, cramped and chilled by the dampness where he lay, was wondering if he would have to remain where he was all night and then perhaps be locked in when the last man out

fastened the trap door. However, his anxiety was relieved in a short time by the loud snoring of the men as they lay curled up on some bags of meal. Descending from his precarious perch, he rapidly made his way up into the cabin. Being highly pleased over the outcome of his night's work, Malcomson decided to play a practical joke on the sheriff.

Taking the jugs that were in the cabin to a nearby spring, he poured out most of the liquor and refilled them with water, placing them back where he found them. "Now," he said to himself with a laugh, as he moved down the mountain, "I guess the sheriff will have some real grounds for suspicions."

The next day Malcomson was in the Court House looking up land titles and talking trades for coal mines, but no one saw him buy anything.

* * * * * * * *

About dusk, the sheriff, accompanied by a dozen deputies, rode east into the haunts of the moonshiners. Speculation was rife about town as to the possible outcome of the raid. Very few expressed confidence in its success. It was another case of the boy who cried "Wolf."

About three hours after the departure of the sheriff's posse, heavy firing was heard in the

direction they had taken. Shortly after, a deputy rode into town, his horse foaming, hat gone, and several bullet holes through his clothes. He reported a fierce battle in which scores of moonshiners were desperately engaged against the representatives of the law.

Just as a small army of men was preparing to go to the relief of the hard-pressed officers, another deputy arrived on a jaded horse and reported a complete rout of the moonshiners, with no loss on the side of the defenders of law and order. He also reported the capture of a still and a large quantity of whiskey. Late that night the sheriff and his deputies arrived in town with the spoils of war, which were carefully stored in the sheriff's own cellar for safe-keeping.

Next morning the excitement was raised to fever pitch by the report that while the good sheriff slept, wearied from his great exertions, some miscreants had sneaked into his cellar and carried away all the captured liquor.

On the following day the excitement was redoubled when it became known that at an elaborate banquet the night before, attended by a great company of the town's most prominent people, when the guests arose to toast "our brave sheriff," the toast was suddenly drowned out by curses, deep and long, as the guests touched lips

to plain spring water flavored with corn juice. The banquet ended in what was almost a riot, many of the guests charging the sheriff with having played them a low-down trick.

But Sam Perkins, the town wag, said, "No, sir! Somebody is double-crossing the sheriff and calling his bluff. The raid was a bluff, I tell you—big talk, big battle, big noise, no bloodshed, no prisoners, ten jugs of water—a water haul. Somebody filled those jugs. Who's on the water wagon?"

For many days the sheriff had to listen to all sorts of jokes and answer all kinds of questions about the difference between real liquor and spring water, and whether he had any suspicions as to who filled the jugs. Malcomson smiled as he went about town, and said nothing. Only to Matoaka did he reveal his part in the affair.

XII

Planning Political Reform

Malcomson had not visited the Whitfield home since his discovery of the underground stills and Alonzo's connection with the moonshiners. He had a feeling of delicacy in accepting hospitality while holding evidence against Whitfield that he might have to use against him later.

The revelations of the night in the cavern placed him in an embarrassing position and gave him anxious concern. He had secured damaging evidence against all the important moonshiners and bootleggers of the country—sufficient evidence to convict a number of the most prominent citizens and a few officials of the county. He had run down a powerful clan of desperate characters operating under official protection, which, by its family and political affiliations, linked together every important section of three counties. He could light a fuse that would touch off a mine, causing a tremendous explosion. But would any good results follow?

The county government was controlled by the

outlaw element. It would be next to impossible to get a conviction in the local courts, and Federal agents would not get local support in gathering evidence or making arrests. Altogether, it was a dark outlook; but the thing that most deeply troubled Malcomson was the part being played by Whitfield. The latter was recognized as the chief of the outlaw band. He was also the father of Stony Jack and of Matoaka. What would Matoaka think of the man who would turn evidence against her father and put him in jail, bringing humiliation and disgrace upon the family?

Malcomson loved Matoaka. He was sure of that, had been sure, even while in France. He had asked for assignment to this territory in the hope of being near her, and now he found himself in a position, the outcome of which might destroy the happiness of her home. He felt inclined to resign his post and go away with the secrets he had discovered locked up in his heart.

It was a knotty problem to solve—the problem of the struggle between love and duty. It was too knotty for him, and he decided to consult the preacher, whose opinions upon the political and social questions of the day he had learned to value. He enjoyed the preacher's fiery eloquence

when he heard him denouncing sin and lawlessness at the Sunday services.

Malcomson found the preacher busy on plans for a new church building. He began by saying, "I see you are engaged. I'll call again."

"No, sit down!" urged the preacher, putting aside his work. "This can wait and I want to rest a bit, anyhow."

"I'm afraid it will not rest you to hear my troubles," answered Malcomson gloomily.

"You troubled?" exclaimed the preacher, smiling. "I thought you the happiest, most care-free person in the whole countryside. What is the nature of your malady? Anything wrong up the road?"

"Yes, that's just it," said Malcomson, and he gave the preacher a rapid résumé of the situation as he had developed it. The preacher was not surprised at the revelations. They only confirmed his own suspicions, which had been aroused as he traveled about the country on his mission.

The preacher was silent for a few moments after Malcomson explained his situation, then he said, "Have you told this to Matoaka?"

"No," replied Malcomson, "I did not know whether to tell her, or just pack up and leave without making any explanation.

"I think I would talk it over with her," advised

the preacher quietly. "She is sensible and clear in her view of what is right. She will give you sound counsel. And I wouldn't go away," he continued. "Your duty is here. That much is clear in my mind. When the world's destiny was in the balance and your flag beckoned you, which came first—friends or country?"

"Oh, my country, certainly!" exclaimed the young man earnestly.

"Yes," continued the preacher, "there are certain duties more sacred than domestic or social obligations. You and ten million other brave American boys helped destroy a foreign foe, but a domestic foe as malignant and treacherous is now seeking to undermine the foundations of constitutional government. The call for unselfish service is just as insistent now as it was in the darkest days of the war. To shirk duty now would be to display the spirit of a slacker. You asked me for my advice, son, and I have given it!"

Malcomson arose, his face white and set. He grasped the preacher's hand. "I thank you. I'll see Matoaka, and I'll stick!"

As he walked rapidly away, erect as a soldier going into battle, the preacher watched him go with a feeling of pride. Then he said softly to himself, a mist gathering before his eyes, "I wonder if I am sending that boy to his death as

I sent Stony Jack? God help him and Matoaka!" And the preacher turned back to his work again.

Malcomson went directly to the hospital in order to determine at once the matter of Matoaka's attitude. He found the girl preparing to go home. She greeted him pleasantly and then observing his serious expression, asked, "Why so solemn this fine day? Have you made a bad trade in coal lands?"

"No," he replied without returning her smile, "but I have made discoveries of big trades in other lines of business. Are you in much of a hurry? I want to talk with you."

"Can't you ride home with me?" she asked. "We can talk on the way."

"I would rather talk here," he answered, "if we can be undisturbed for a little while."

"Very well," she acquiesced. "Step in the doctor's private office. He is out making calls."

"I came," he began, as soon as they were both seated, "at the suggestion of the preacher. I was in doubt as to a matter of duty. He gave me his advice and then sent me here for your opinion. My whole future course of action hinges on your decision."

"Why," she protested, blushing, "how could any decision of mine have so much to do with your future?"

"Just this way," replied Malcomson. "I know too much for the security of a large number of people who have been violating the law. Some of these people are very near and dear to you. I do not wish to proceed against them without your sanction. I value your friendship highly, and I do not wish to forfeit it. I have evidence of the existence of a powerful band of moonshiners operating under official protection; many of them are prominent men, socially and politically."

"And you want my opinion," she asked, "upon the question of how to break it up?"

"Not exactly that," he answered. "The band can be broken up without much difficulty, but the process will leave behind a trail of injured reputations, broken home ties, and hearts, and a trail of blood. Forgive me, Matoaka, for revealing to you some very unpleasant facts. I was Stony Jack's buddy. I loved him like a real brother. I would have gladly died for him. He is sleeping over there in France. I came back and took an oath to uphold the constitution and the flag for which he died. In pursuance of my duties in the governmental service, I have made the terrible discovery that my buddy's father—and your father, Matoaka—is king of the moonshiners' band. I am charged with the solemn

duty of bringing him before the bar of justice!"

Matoaka had turned deathly pale during Malcomson's speech. "Are you sure of this?" she asked in the barest whisper.

"Beyond the shadow of a doubt," he replied.

"And what did the preacher advise you to do?"

"My duty. He believes that this conflict is as much a war in behalf of human progress and good government as the raid against the Huns, and that as I put country above personal interests in that great struggle, I should do the same now. My duty is clear!"

She remained silent for some time, and he awaited her answer with beating heart. Finally she arose and walked over to his side, placing her hand upon his shoulder. With a visible effort she said, "The preacher is right, Bruce. Your duty is perfectly clear, and so is mine. Stony Jack would expect his comrade and his sister to keep faith with what he died to save, even against his own father if that father should unfortunately be on the wrong side. Poor father!" she continued sadly. "He does not understand. He has lived in these hills all his life and his mind has been cramped and warped by his environment. He has been robbed by swindlers, discouraged by reverses and tempted by evil men with the accursed lure of gold. His only salvation lies in

the hope that he may see his error before it is too late, but the call of country comes before personal or family interests."

Malcomson sprang to his feet and grasped her hand. "You're a wonder!" he exclaimed. "The preacher said you would advise me right, and I am sure you have. We will face the problem together and try to save your father's name if possible."

Matoaka thought deeply for a moment before she suggested, "Why couldn't we organize a reform movement and elect officers who will really enforce the law and definitely discourage law-breaking? Many men become freebooters only because it is so easy to do so when public officials actually encourage violation of the law. Women can vote now and I am sure a great many women and men too will welcome a chance to vote for a change in existing conditions."

"I had thought of that," replied Malcomson. "It's worth trying. We will call a conference of those whom we know are friendly to the reform movement and find out the sentiment of the leaders on the subject. If we can get rid of a lot of corrupt officials and political scoundrels, it would go a long way toward instilling respect for the government in the minds of the people and discouraging the lawless elements."

They discussed the matter of the reform movement until Matoaka was compelled to leave in order to reach her home before night. Planning a really constructive program was a relief to the troubled feelings of both man and girl, forming another common bond of interest for the days to come.

XIII

Felix Raids a Hornets' Nest

The sheriff, feeling that he had not been making conspicuous progress lately against his rival for the attentions and favors of Miss Whitfield, and still craving the distinction of being the son-in-law of Alonzo, decided upon a campaign of aggression. He was prepared, if necessary, to play his trump card—the mortgage he held on Whitfield's farm. The frequent jibes and jokes of his friends in regard to the 'furriner's' place in Matoaka's affections nettled Felix more than he cared to admit.

He determined to put a quietus on his rival and his tormentors at one fell stroke. He would call on Matoaka and lay both his heart and the mortgage at her feet. He could not conceive that such an offering would be refused. How any girl in her right mind could reject a man holding his high position, politically and financially, for an obscure stranger who apparently had no means of providing for her, was beyond the sheriff's comprehension.

Felix planned his moves with unusual care. He even went to the expense of acquiring a new, tailor-made suit of the latest pattern, a silk shirt (his first), patent leather shoes, and a broad-brimmed Stetson hat. Thus attired he felt himself irresistible, and like Solomon in all his glory, his clothes emitting a strong odor of musk, his heart in his mouth and the mortgage in his pocket, Felix rode him forth one lovely Sabbath morning in quest of his lady-love.

Unfortunately, it had rained hard the previous night and there were numerous puddles of muddy water in the road. Felix guided his horse carefully around these treacherous spots, his thoughts winging ahead to the scene of his conquest and his future happiness. All was going as merrily as the proverbial marriage bell, when an evil spirit entered into conspiracy against Felix.

As he rode joyously along all unconscious of impending disaster, the sound of his horse's hoofs disturbed the dreams of a stray hog lying in a corner of the fence enjoying a late Sunday morning nap. The porker's start and grunt of protest alarmed the sheriff's usually docile horse, and he shied abruptly to one side, planting both forefeet deep in a pool of muddy water. The consequences were disastrous. Felix's new suit and silk shirt-front received a baptism of ugly

yellow mud, completely ruining his brave appearance and dampening his exuberant spirits.

On first thought the sheriff was disposed to retrace his steps and make a fresh start. But, recalling the old proverb of bad luck attending a journey thus interrupted, and desiring to do nothing that might jeopardize the success of his mission, he decided not to tempt fate by turning back. By riding slowly in the sun he calculated his suit would dry sufficiently to scrape off the mud before he reached the Whitfield home. The splash on his shirt-front was more serious. Then he was struck with a happy thought: he would ride into the bushes, take off his shirt, and turn it wrong side out. Thus both time and soap would be saved.

Putting the brilliant idea into immediate execution, he rode into a thicket beneath a large beech tree with low, broad branches. Already seriously delayed on his important errand, the sheriff decided to prove his dexterity and economize on time by making the transformation while still seated in the saddle. Carefully removing coat, vest and tie, and hanging them on a limb, he began the apparently simple feat of 'skinning the cat' by pulling his shirt off over his head. Had the shirt been larger and the day not quite so warm, the task would have been easy. After

several heroic efforts, aided by sundry voluble oaths, Felix succeeded in getting his arms half way out of the sleeves, leaving his head, like that of a frightened terrapin, concealed in the folds of the shirt bosom. At this crucial moment he thrust one arm up wildly among the overhanging branches in a frantic effort to disentangle himself.

The evil spirit still pursuing the sheriff had hung a huge hornets' nest directly over his head. Its inmates were quietly enjoying the peace of that Sunday morning, when the man's hand suddenly drove half way through their domicile. The whole colony sallied out in battle array to defend its hearth and home.

The attack was instant and furious. Felix had not a moment's warning; he was utterly helpless. Afterward he was grateful that his head and hands were protected. The hornets assailed him on the one exposed spot of his ample body—a bare strip of back about six inches wide just above the band of his trousers. The horse, at the first hint of danger, dashed away through the bushes at a furious pace, snorting with pain and terror. The sheriff, handicapped as he was, had difficulty in keeping his seat. He clung desperately to the horn of the saddle and horse's mane with his muffled hands, bellowing to the

frantic animal to stop. He might as well have commanded old Father Time to stay his onward flight. "Hell Roaring Felix," he lived up to his name with a power and volume of expression that did him credit.

The sheriff had no idea where he was being carried. He only knew that the animal under him was breaking all speed records in a state where racing is one of the chief sources of entertainment and revenue. It was scarcely a half-mile to the Whitfield farm and, unkown to his rider, the horse covered the distance in an incredibly short time, goaded on by more than two score of infuriated hornets avenging an insult. The yard gate of the farm was open and the maddened animal dashed through in a vain attempt to escape his tormentors. The half dozen hounds lounging on the porch gave chase, yelping with the full power of their lungs.

Matoaka was frightened when she first saw the frenzied horse come tearing up the road; when he entered the gate, his strange rider clinging desperately to his mane, she was amazed. Then, as the significance of the spectacle burst upon her, she was convulsed with laughter, in which she was joined by all the children. Felix heard their peals of merriment and they stung him with a more bitter smart than the sting of

the hornets. That laughter was the death knell of all his high hopes. He knew that when a man excites the ridicule of the object of his affections, all is over but the interment of the corpse.

Matoaka sent Carlo to open the stable door and head the horse in that direction, hoping he might find a refuge from the hornets in its cool, darkened interior. As the animal dashed through the low door of the stable, Felix was caught against the overhead timber and swept off, sprawling stunned in the yard.

"What yer all tryin' to do, sheriff?" drawled Carlo, grinning. "Trainin' to be a circus hoss rider?"

Partially recovered from the effects of his tumble, Felix arose and went into the barn without a word, closing the door behind him. Once inside, he brought what order he could out of the chaos of his appearance and calmed his nervous horse. When sure that it was safe, he emerged, mounted his horse and rode away, not once looking toward the house. A consuming feudal hate burned in his soul like a seven-fold heated furnace—a hate that would burn until quenched in human blood. He meditated a revenge that would humiliate Matoaka, and humble her haughty spirit, at the same time effectively disposing of his hated rival, Malcomson. Then, with

the field clear and Whitfield in his power, the way would be plain for his final triumph. He'd show them!

As he rode down the lane, erect and defiant, looking neither to the right nor the left, Matoaka read a menace in his bearing, and a chill of impending danger gripped her heart. She was a little sorry that she had laughed.

XIV

The New Deputy Sheriff

The idea of political reform championed by Matoaka struck a responsive chord in many hearts in the community, and the movement assumed definite form in a platform pledged to law-enforcement and the administration of equal justice. A ticket was placed in the field, most of the candidates being ex-service men who had proved their devotion and loyalty on the battle-field. Malcomson and the preacher rallied the men to the new standard, while Matoaka organized clubs among those women who had been most active in Red Cross work. Soon the campaign was in full swing.

At first the matter was treated as a joke by the old line politicians and their henchmen. Reform tickets had been put in the field before and never had amounted to anything. They predicted this would be a similar flash. But this movement had more vitality. When a number of mass meetings were held, attended by large and enthusiastic crowds, the leaders of the old

gang became alarmed, and ridicule gave place to criticism and abuse. Women in politics proved an offense to their sensitive souls and an outrage to their moral standards. Matoaka came in for a large share of criticism, being a conspicuous leader in organization work; she had even dared to address a few meetings when the appointed speakers failed to appear.

"Fool notions picked up over in France," was the caustic comment of a former judge of the county, after listening to her on one such occasion. "We've give 'em too much liberty and they'll destroy the peace of our country, jest like the first one did in the paradise God fixed up for man's happiness."

"Didn't I warn yer all?" demanded Judge Hull. "That danged new railroad has filled up this peaceful country with those danged furriners with their high notions of reform and edication, and a lot of our fool people hev fell fer 'em. The good old days is gone ferever."

"Yep!" broke in the sheriff, now fully recovered from his encounter with the hornets, "some of our gals has got too much book larnin' an' have got edicated above thar people. They've gone crazy over these furriners and turned agin thar own blood kin."

"Sure," agreed Sam Perkins, the wag. "I hear

they have even jilted some of our leadin' citizens to follow the call of the strangers. They've even gone to the point where, when our young men attempt to call on them, they sic the hogs and hornets on 'em. With such outlandish pranks goin' on our young men have no more chance against these slick-tongued, smooth-mannered strangers than a wooden legged dog chasin' an asbestos cat through the streets of hell!"

"Ain't yer saying a plum whole mouthful!" exclaimed Baz Belcher. "It's a red hot, burnin' shame! It's time we showed these fellers whar they are headin' in at."

* * * * * * * *

Both Malcomson and the preacher threw themselves into the campaign for reform without reserve, realizing that conditions were favorable for the overthrow of the political machine that for years had managed the affairs of the county to its own taste and profit. Most of the coal corporations were sympathetic with the innovators, while a few of them were lending open support. Several of the larger companies, putting dollars above duty to country, opposed any change; they wanted to see men in office amenable to their dictation, feeling that their power and prestige entitled them to special favors.

The politicians were growing daily more

panicky over the rising tide of reform, and held many conferences to devise a method of wet-blanketing the movement. The sheriff and Judge Hull were prominent in these meetings, the sheriff meditating a double revenge; he sought the death of Malcomson and an enforced marriage with Matoaka. His cowardly soul shrank from doing the actual killing; he would choose some roundabout way that would absolve him from blame.

An idea had been slowly taking form in his brain. He realized he was under suspicion of being in league with the outlaws, and his scheme aimed to deal one master stroke which would vindicate himself and dispose of Malcomson. With the latter, the life and soul of the reform movement, out of the way, it would be a simple matter to wreck the campaign. It was an ingenious though diabolical idea.

The sheriff knew that Malcomson was absolutely fearless and incorruptible. Why not appoint him to a deputyship and set him the task of fighting the outlaws? This would prove the sincerity of Felix in his efforts to enforce the law, and at the same time give the freebooters a good excuse for removing the deputy by death. Felix would be the gainer in both events. He never doubted that 'the boys' would execute

their part of the program. At a secret gathering of the ring, the scheme was unanimously approved, and Felix was urged to act promptly as time was passing.

The following day the sheriff approached Malcomson on the matter, expressing his high opinion of the latter's courage and ability. Malcomson listened to him attentively and then replied, "I will accept the position on two conditions."

"Name them," said the sheriff promptly, willing to grant a dozen concessions to gain his point. "I'll give yer unlimited power."

"That's one," answered Malcomson. "The other is that you appoint Creed Houchins as my assistant."

Houchins was an ex-service man who had a distinguished service medal for bravery. He and Malcomson had become fast friends.

"Gosh! Yer mean bizness!" exclaimed the sheriff. "When do yer want ter start?"

"Now!" replied Malcomson, "and, sheriff, I serve notice on you right now that we are going into this fight with eyes wide open, and I guarantee we will bring in more evidence of being on the job than a few gallons of water. We shall expect your full co-operation, and there must be no attempt at double-crossing us in the

campaign. Call up Houchins and give us our badges!"

That evening Malcomson and Houchins held a consultation and decided that the way to aid the reform cause and create a stampede among the forces of evil was to strike swift and hard. They would soon prove the suspicions against the sheriff well founded by securing immediate results.

Matoaka was deeply distressed when she heard of the sheriff's appointment, feeling confident that there was some treacherous motive behind the act. She warned Malcomson of his suspected danger and he admitted that he held similar suspicions, but felt confident he could forestall any plot by prompt action.

Two nights later the two newly appointed deputies slipped unobserved into the mountain fastness. Entering a region from which the bootleggers were known to have been operating, they spent several hours in fruitless search. Finally, after arranging a code of signals, they separated to explore both sides of a long ridge, planning to meet at the head of a creek some miles beyond.

Malcomson had not gone far on his course when, rounding a sharp turn at the head of a ravine near a large spring, he came suddenly

upon five men busily engaged in running off the product of a two-hundred gallon still. The moonshiners had removed their coats and stacked their guns against a tree some fifteen or twenty feet away. Feeling perfectly secure from surprise, they had posted no lookout. The surprise was mutual and complete. Malcomson was the first to recover.

"Throw up your hands!" he shouted, leveling his gun. "Don't move, or I'll kill you!"

"Throw up yer heels, yer damned spy!" replied one of the men, making a dash for his gun.

Malcomson's gun cracked and the man fell. Four more shots rang out on the night air in quick succession, and the five moonshiners lay huddled in a helpless heap. Not a man reached his gun. In a few seconds, the busy outlaw enterprise had been transformed into a tragic scene of destruction—three men were stone dead and two badly wounded.

Malcomson quickly reloaded his gun, ignorant of how soon other outlaws might appear on the scene. He blew a whistle for Houchins, but the latter had heard the shots and was hurrying to his aid. The two deputies rendered what assistance they could to the injured men.

"I am sorry you did not heed my warning," said Malcomson to the two survivors. "I didn't

want to injure you, but you forced my hand; it was you or me."

"Like hell we did!" cried one of the men. "W'at yer doin' out hyar? We warn't meddlin' with yer! Why didn't yer stay home an 'tend ter yer own bizness? Who sent yer out hyar?"

"The sheriff did," replied Malcomson quietly. "He commissioned us to break up lawlessness in these mountains."

"Aw, he did, did he? Damn him! We'll git him, an' yer too! Why didn't he send yer arter old 'Lonzo an' his clan? W'at yer pickin' on us little fellers fur? That damned sheriff's pertectin' the big shiners and houndin' us little fellers. Yer won't give a pore man no chanct ter pervide a honest livin' fer his family. It's our land, ain't it? It's our corn, ain't it? We raise it, don't we? If we wants to sell it in sacks er jugs, it's our bizness, ain't it? Who in hell says we kayn't?"

"The government forbids it," answered Malcomson.

"Then to hell with yer government!" shrieked the outlaw. "My daddy made likker in these hills, an' his daddy did, an' his daddy did, an' nobody stopped 'em. An' yer won't stop me—only with bullets," he added after a pause. "Oh, Lordy! I'm afraid I'm goin' to die!"

The officers tried to reassure him, and began to plan for the removal of the two wounded men to the hospital.

"We're in a pickle, Houchins," admitted Malcomson. "We have made a bigger haul than we figured on."

"We can't carry the men out without help," replied Houchins, "and we can't very well leave them alone."

"No," admitted the other, "there is only one thing to do. I crippled these men and I'll stay on guard while you go for help. Bring a sled as far up the ridge as you can, and make as good time as you can. There may be a dozen more moonshiners here before you get back."

It was a long, anxious wait. Malcomson made his two prisoners as comfortable as possible near the fire, while he kept watch in the shadows for the possible coming of other outlaws. None came. He had killed or captured the entire party.

After what seemed a very long time, Houchins arrived with several men, including a doctor, and the wounded men and their dead comrades were removed to town. Intense excitement ensued. The streets filled with angry men and women. Stern visaged mountaineers, heavily armed, came in from the hills, openly voicing threats against the two deputies. Consternation reigned in the

camp of Felix and his political clique. Their plans had wofully miscarried. Their calculations had, by some mischance, failed. They had misjudged both the new deputy and the moonshiners; had set their line for a sucker and caught a tartar.

The situation was tense. The friends of the deputies rallied around them, but some of the more timid advised them to "beat it out of the valley," as it would only be a question of time until the outlaws would kill them.

Matoaka—not from timidity, but love—joined in this warning. She knew the relentless, vengeful spirit of the mountaineers, and realized that the two officers would walk in the shadow of death until the fatal shot was fired; their doom was sealed. The men themselves knew this as well as anyone, but steadfastly refused to leave. They had anticipated just this contingency when they accepted their commissions from the sheriff.

"When I went to France," said Malcomson, "I got used to the idea that I might be killed any minute. I expected to be killed. That I came back alive was my good fortune. When I took my oath of office I again put my life into the hands of the government. I cannot run away. You would not have me show the white feather after the first battle. I shall be on my guard, but I am sworn to stick to my post."

XV

Matoaka Offers to Marry Felix

Alonzo was greatly upset over the death of the moonshiners, some of whom were his neighbors. He became sullen, irritable and skulking, avoiding Matoaka. He was absent from home more than ever.

One evening Matoaka, coming home earlier than usual, found her father and the sheriff deep in earnest conversation. Both were obviously embarrassed by her appearance, and the sheriff quickly excused himself after greeting her briefly. Alonzo looked guilty and avoided her gaze.

"Father," she inquired meaningly, "what is the sheriff after today? He has not been here for a long time."

"Oh, he's all busted up over that killin' by his fool deputy, who 'pears to take his new job seriously. Felix is 'feared the people will place the blame on him. Felix didn't think it would happen thataway."

"No," said Matoaka, "he thought it would be

just the other way—a dead deputy. I think the sheriff is probably worried over his plans going wrong.

"Father," continued the girl, "can't you, won't you, do something to correct the deplorable conditions existing in this county? This state of affairs cannot continue. Brave officers are being murdered in cold blood. Men are being shot, or sent to prison, taken from their homes, leaving families destitute. It broke my heart today to see the forlorn wives of those wounded moonshiners come in with a hunted look in their tearless eyes, the little, frightened, ragged, underfed children clinging to the skirts of their mothers. *They* are the real sufferers and innocent victims of the reign of lawlessness now existing."

Whitfield was powerfully moved by her earnest appeal, and shifted uneasily in his chair. Huskily he replied, "I wish I could! I wish I could! But I'm all balled up an' swamped by debts. Felix is crowdin' me an' says I must settle up. I don't know what he means."

"I do," said Matoaka calmly. "He means to force you to your knees, kill or run Malcomson out of the country, and compel me to marry him, whether I want to or not."

"Well," temporized her father, "Malcomson is a fool for staying an' fightin' the people, an'

tryin' to change thar habits. Felix, he's been a good friend uv the family, an' he thinks a heap o' you, Matoaka," continued her father hesitantly. "He'd pervide yer a good home."

"Do you wish me to marry him, father?" asked the girl in a tone utterly unlike her usual calm one.

"No," replied her father, "not perzactly, if yer don't want to. He axed me ef I'd anything ter say again' it pervidin' you agreed."

"And so he has already gained your consent," she said bitterly.

"Wal, I told him I reckoned I'd hev to let him hev yer ter settle that air mortgage."

"What did he say?" she demanded scornfully.

"He said he reckoned—"

"Father," broke in the harassed girl, "I despise Felix Luster! He is a low, ignorant, vulgar, drunken scoundrel. He is in league with outlaws and criminals. He has perjured himself before the state and before God. I would rather die than marry him if I were the only one concerned, but if you will brace up and settle down to an honest life once more, and save Malcomson from Felix and his murderous clan I'll marry Felix and pay off your mortgage!"

She spoke vehemently, tears coursing down her cheeks. Alonzo slumped uneasily in his chair,

watching an eagle circle slowly about a distant mountain peak. "I wish I could," he repeated sadly, after a long pause. "I wish I could."

"Why can't you, father?" demanded Matoaka.

"They won't let me," he replied dully. "They'd kill me. I know too much. They'd kill Malcomson anyhow. He'd better git, an' git while the gittin's good."

Matoaka could say no more. She felt as if the weight of tragic circumstances was slowly but surely crushing her. She could not eat her supper, and afterward went directly to her room, sad with a sense of lowering storm clouds that would envelop them all, including Malcomson, in overwhelming disaster. She could not sleep, but paced her room with nerves tense, trembling at every sound. About ten o'clock she heard horses' hoofs come rapidly down the valley.

Malcomson, that same evening, had gone alone into the mountains east of her home after some violators of the law, whose activities had been reported to the sheriff. The sheriff, in turn, had given the tip to his deputy.

* * * * * * * *

The horseman whose approach Matoaka had heard stopped at the front gate and came in. The dogs greeted him with a great commotion, and the girl heard her father angrily silencing

them. Her father had undoubtedly been waiting on the porch for the arrival of the unknown horseman. She heard him inquire in a low voice, "What's the news?"

"We got him this time, damn him!" the man replied.

"Speak lower. Somebody will hear," her father cautioned.

Quickly and silently Matoaka crept down the stairs and took a stand in the dark front room near the open door. The man spoke so low that she could hear very little, but enough to cause her to reel and almost fall. With a tremendous effort, she pulled herself together and groped her way back to her room, where she made rapid preparations for departure. She had caught the words: "Felix—furriner—Ivy Ridge—Rattlesnake Glen—fine plan—we're safe now."

She heard her father and the man walk out to the gate and grasped the opportunity thus offered her to slip out the back way, softly calling to Major, her Belgian police dog. He followed her without a whimper. It was after ten o'clock and dark, but the moon would rise about midnight.

Matoaka hurried to the stable and had Rosewood saddled, ready to go, when she heard her father enter the house and the horseman ride

off toward town. She led Rosewood out to the road in order to avoid arousing anyone, then mounted and rode cautiously until certain that she was out of reach of her father's ears. Then she gave Rosewood the rein, urging her horse to top speed. Major kept close to the horse's heels, making no sound.

The road, much of the way, was little more than a bridle path, but Rosewood was keen-eyed, sure-footed, wiry and thoroughly familiar with his surroundings.

Overhanging branches of trees and clinging tendrils of ivy almost swept the girl from the horse's back many times, but she clung on, bending low, urging Rosewood forward. She was bound for Ivy Ridge, where she would look first for signs of the terrible tragedy she was confident had been enacted. Her heart was beating wildly, not so much from fear for herself as from excitement and dread anticipation. She knew not what moment she might run into a band of outlaws, or be shot by mistake from ambush. Her preparations had included a revolver buckled securely in her belt, but she prayed that she might escape observation and not be called upon to use it.

The really very short time which it took Rosewood to cover the three miles to Ivy Ridge

seemed ages to Matoaka. Riding up the Ridge some distance, she dismounted and spoke to Major. "Man lost, Major! Man hurt! Find him, Major! That's a good dog, go quickly! He may be dying! Maybe—dead. Oh, God!" she half sobbed, "help us find him!"

Ivy Ridge was a long, narrow backbone, bare of timber on top, but with sides thickly covered with ivy thickets and scrubby trees—an ideal location for lurking assassins to conceal themselves while their victim rode or walked up the Ridge, clearly outlined against the skyline.

Major eagerly took up the search, going rapidly up the Ridge, alternately sniffing the air and the ground, his hair standing up on his back as if he sensed the presence of enemies. Matoaka followed, leading Rosewood and peering into the darkness on all sides, expecting at any minute to see a well-known form, but dreading the sight.

After proceeding nearly a quarter of a mile, Major stopped, whined, and uttered a low growl. With revolver in hand, Matoaka hastened cautiously forward, not knowing what terrible sight or what enemies might be lurking amidst the shadows. Rosewood manifested some uneasiness and sniffed the air as if he too scented danger.

Matoaka overtook Major standing by a clump

of bushes; at his feet lay a hat with a bullet hole through the crown. Picking it up, the girl recognized it as the one worn by Malcomson the last time she saw him. She was afraid to call for help lest the outlaws be lurking near and hear her voice. She was now fully convinced that Malcomson had been murdered. She knew the deadly aim of the mountaineer and something of their habits and methods of concealing the bodies of their victims. Her father's caller had mentioned Rattlesnake Glen. She understood that there was where she would find the body.

The Glen was nearly a mile distant. There was not a better spot in all the mountains for the outlaws to conceal forever Malcomson's body from human sight. The Glen was a narrow depression between two high hills. It was as if the earth had sunk for thirty or forty yards, leaving almost perpendicular walls on either side. A small creek flowed through the depression thus made, while wide-branching hemlock trees towered above it, casting the narrow valley into shade. A rank growth of laurel and ivy increased the impression of gloominess. The place had derived its name from the large number of rattlesnakes that congregated there to hibernate and to breed in the Spring. Wildcats, foxes and other denizens of the forest found it a safe place for

concealment when too hotly pressed by enemies. To drop a dead man in there was like dropping him in an abyss of nothingness. No one ever frequented the place willingly.

Matoaka had never visited the Glen, but she had heard many harrowing tales of its horrors and the dark secrets it held. She now felt sure that the body of the man she so greatly loved was resting there—and, horror of horrors! that he might not yet be dead! It was this thought that drove her on. Trembling like a leaf, with cold sweat running down her face, she shrank in horror at the thought of entering the Glen at such an hour and on such a mission. Breathing a prayer to heaven for courage and strength, she mounted Rosewood, calling softly to Major, "Find man, Major, follow trail. Quickly!"

A soft glow along the eastern horizon told that the moon would soon be up, dispelling some of the gloom which served to render the scene so terrifying.

Major struck off toward the Glen, head down, following what seemed to be a plainly marked trail. The country grew wilder and more desolate as they proceeded, Rosewood picking his way carefully among the trees and over fallen logs, following Major.

As they approached the Glen, Major quickened his pace as if more sure of his quest. A low bark escaped him for the first time, and he ran back to Matoaka, wagging his tail, as though trying to urge her on. Matoaka took heart from the dog's actions, and the first flicker of hope penetrated the inky darkness that enveloped her soul. They reached the edge of the Glen and Major stood peering into the black abyss, whining, but not with fear.

XVI

A Race With Death

Rattlesnake Glen was dark beyond description. Disturbing sounds of strange animal life broke the silence, and the shrill, quavering cry of a screech-owl cut the midnight stillness, making Matoaka shiver. Descent into the dark abyss seemed impossible, even though a way were visible and she had the courage to attempt it.

Major barked, louder this time and more insistently. Matoaka decided to call out, the sound of her voice startling her as it broke the stillness. "Bruce! Oh, Bruce!" she called softly.

A faint cry came back from the inky depths. With a glad yelp of recognition, Major went plunging and sliding over the brink, and Matoaka could hear him whining and barking in delighted recognition of his friend.

Again Matoaka called. "Bruce, are you badly hurt?"

"Yes, can you come down?" the answer was very faint.

"I am afraid not. The bank is so steep and it's so dark!"

"A little to your left there is a ravine where you can get dawn by clinging to the bushes," he instructed her.

Matoaka tied Rosewood and, slipping and sliding, made the hazardous descent. She found Malcomson wedged painfully between a fallen tree and a large rock, where he had lodged when the outlaws rolled him into the Glen. Exerting all her strength, the girl lifted him into a more comfortable position, observing as she did so that his right arm hung limp and that his face was smeared with blood. It took all her professional control to keep hysteria out of her voice. "Oh, you *are* hurt, Bruce! Dreadfully hurt! Tell me how it happened. I thought you were dead!"

"So did our friends, the moonshiners," he told her. "They're planning a big celebration tomorrow. I hope we can give them a little surprise by turning it into a ghost dance. I'm dying of thirst," he complained. "Can you get to the branch there and bring me some water?"

She took his hat, which she still carried, and scrambled down to the branch, managing to bring back enough water to quench his thirst.

Somewhat revived, he made an effort to pull himself to a sitting position. "How on earth

did you get here?" he asked. "Who told you?"

"No one," she answered. "I overheard fragments of a message one of the moonshiners brought father. Major found you. But for his help I never could have made the trip. I never expected to find you alive, though," she added, with a catch in her voice.

"Well, it was no fault of our friends that your worst fears were not realized. I managed to fool them. The sheriff gave me a tip that I would find moonshiners on Ivy Ridge, but I think he also gave the boys a tip that they would find me there. At any rate, they were expecting me and, without any formalities, gave me a warm reception. There were four of them and each one gave me a token of his regard. I thought, as I dropped, that I was done for, but decided to play the game through. Remembering how dead men looked in France, I have a good imitation of one. The trick worked. They seemed to be in a hurry and didn't examine me closely, but threw me on the back of a mule and carried me here. The pain was terrible, and I must have fainted on the way. They rolled me over the bank there with the remark that if I wasn't dead the rattlesnakes and varmints would finish me in the morning. Then I fainted again from pain and loss of blood. I had just revived about the

time you got here. Brave old Major!" he said, stroking the dog. "And God bless brave, heroic Matoaka!" he added reverently. "But now, getting away is the problem. The rattlesnakes, both the walking and crawling kind, will soon be abroad."

"What are we to do?" demanded Matoaka disconsolately. "You can't walk and I can't carry you. To go to town for help would betray us to our enemies. And if I am missed from home they will suspect my mission and may be on the way here even now. What *shall* we do?"

After a long pause, during which he did some quick thinking, Malcomson spoke, somewhat hesitatingly. "There seems to be only one chance for us, but I dread, for your sake, to propose it."

"Don't hesitate on my account," she urged eagerly. "What you propose can't be any worse than what I have been through!"

"Well," he said, "on the other side of the range at Big Vein Camp, there is a squad of detectives, members of a private agency. They are daring and dependable, and have never been bluffed, bull-dozed, nor beaten to a draw. If you can reach them in time, we are safe. Otherwise, I'm afraid I have lost the fight. I hate to send you, Matoaka," he continued. "It's a good fifteen

miles hard riding through a wild country and a rough road much of the way."

"I'll go!" she interrupted. "Rosewood is strong and fast, and I can trust him. Here, take this revolver. If anyone tries to molest you before I return, you and Major can make some sort of defense."

"No! No!" objected Malcomson vehemently. "You need it more than I. You don't foresee what you may encounter on the way."

"I know," she insisted, "but if Rosewood can't carry me through, the gun would be of little assistance. How shall I go to reach the camp?"

"Go down to the valley road," explained Malcomson carefully. "Strike east to where the road forks, and take the left-hand trail up the mountainside toward Pinnacle Gap. After you reach the divide, it's a straight ride for eight miles down the side of the mountain. You can't miss the camp. Call for Bascomb Gillespie and tell him he is needed over here. He'll do the rest. You had better stay there and rest. Bring me a little more water before you go, though. I'm terribly thirsty. But I'm not in any immediate danger unless the gang comes back," he reassured her, "in which case Major and I will entertain them as best we can. Tell Gillespie to make haste!"

The exertion of speaking had exhausted his

strength, but the water Matoaka brought somewhat revived him.

After further exchange of directions and words of mutual encouragement, Matoaka started up the side of the Glen for her horse, Major following. "No! No! Major," she cried, "you must stay here and guard Bruce!" Whether the dog understood her or not, he walked back and lay down beside Malcomson.

Mounting Rosewood, Matoaka picked her way down the mountainside. The moon was high now, which made it easier to find the path. Reaching the main road, she urged Rosewood to his best speed. The powerful horse seemed to realize what was wanted of him, and responded gallantly to her urging. Matoaka bent low in the saddle, patting the horse on his glossy neck and talking to him encouragingly. The splendid animal scarcely slackened his speed as he struck the mountain road, climbing the steep grade with steady, distance-destroying strides. He was wet with sweat and great flecks of foam flew from his mouth.

They reached Pinnacle Gap, topping the divide without untoward incident. But just as Matoaka felt herself well on the way to victory, she saw something which made her heart almost stop beating, and the blood run chill in her veins.

Standing at the top of the divide, facing each other across the road, so that their horses' heads almost met, were two silent horsemen, blocking her progress.

"Halt!" boomed out a voice which Matoaka recognized as belonging to the sheriff.

For answer she gave Rosewood a cut in the flank with a switch she had broken off while coming down the mountain. It was the first time she had ever struck him, and with a snort of amazement and pain, the animal reared on his haunches and plunged forward, seeming to bound clear of the ground and hurdle over, rather than go between, the two standing horses.

As the sheriff lunged forward to grasp her bridle reins, Matoaka gave Felix a slashing cut across the face that elicited a roar of rage, and by the time the man had recovered from his surprise, Rosewood was a good hundred yards away, plunging down the road like a veritable tornado.

"Stop her! Stop her!" yelled Felix to his companion. "She must not reach Big Vein Camp. If she does, we've traded the devil for a witch, and got hell to boot!"

Matoaka, rejoicing over her lucky escape, was urging Rosewood onward by every means at her command without using the switch. That must be reserved for another emergency. The two men

were mounted on fresh horses, while Rosewood was hot and jaded from the long climb up the mountainside, and there was still eight miles of winding road to traverse before the camp would be reached. Had Rosewood been as fresh as his pursuers, he could easily have distanced them, but his condition gave them an advantage which they were quick to realize and press to the utmost.

Matoaka perceived that the odds were against her, but the stake for which she rode—the life of Malcomson, the man she loved—nerved her to make a supreme effort in the hopes that a kind Providence would interpose in her favor. The blood-smeared face of Malcomson rose before her eyes. She must not lose the race! She must win, though it cost Rosewood his life. If one must be sacrificed, Rosewood would be the victim.

For three miles, in spite of his heavy handicap, Rosewood held his lead. Then he began to break perceptibly, and to falter. Matoaka noted his slackening pace and renewed her pleadings for even greater speed. She could hear the pounding of the approaching horses' feet behind her, and the beating of the hoofs was like a devil's tattoo of death on her breaking heart.

Slowly the distance between the pursued and

pursuers narrowed — seventy-five yards — fifty yards—forty—thirty. The sheriff fired several shots in an attempt to cripple Rosewood, but his aim was wild. But the shots had one effect that the sheriff little anticipated, or he would not have fired.

It so happened that Bascomb Gillespie and Buster Daily were out in the woods searching for outlaws and had come down to the road about two miles below where the shots were fired. At the first crack, Gillespie ejaculated, "That's either an attempt to kill someone or a call for help. In either event, we're needed. Come on!" And the two men hurried up the road.

They reached a point where they could hear the pounding of the horses' flying feet, and Daily offered, quite facetiously, "There seems to be a powerful horse race on. We'll be in at the finish and hold the stakes."

Not ten yards separated Rosewood from his rapidly gaining pursuers. The gallant animal was staggering, and Matoaka, in an agony of frenzy and fear at the thought of failure, was plying her switch to the foaming sides of the horse. Rosewood did his gallant best, but it was no use—he was winded and done for. A mist rose before Matoaka's eyes; outlines were blurred. She was

swaying in her saddle; the hard breathing of the pursuing horses almost at her back.

Feeling that the moment of victory had come, the sheriff rose in his saddle and shouted, "Halt, or I'll fire!"

"Halt yourself, or we'll both fire," came in stentorian tones, as the two detectives rounded a curve in the road with guns leveled.

The sheriff was so completely taken back by the unexpected appearance of the men that he dropped his gun and, grasping his horse's bridle with both hands, pulled back with such force that the animal was thrown, breaking a leg and hurling Felix over his head into the bushes several yards below the road. He never came back to claim either gun or horse. His companion threw himself from his mount and followed the sheriff, shots from the detectives' guns accelerating his movements.

Gillespie caught Rosewood's bridle with one hand and Matoaka with the other, as she reeled fainting from the saddle. Rosewood staggered a few paces, swayed and collapsed. He stretched out his tired limbs full length, uttered a long drawn sigh, shivered and lay still. Matoaka revived in a few moments and in broken sentences made the men understand Malcomson's desperate need of help.

"Daily," directed Gillespie, "you take Miss Whitfield to the clubhouse, put her in care of the housekeeper, rouse the boys, get the doctor, and make all speed to Rattlesnake Glen. I'll take this deputy's horse, after putting the sheriff's out of his misery, and go direct to the Glen. I know a short cut and will be there by the time you reach camp."

Matoaka pleaded to be allowed to accompany Gillespie, but the latter objected. "This is a man's job. You've done more now than I ever thought possible for a woman. We'll relieve you, you are all in and need a rest."

He shot the sheriff's horse with cool deliberation, mounted the other, and was gone.

"Dear old Rosewood," said Matoaka, stroking the neck of her horse, tears coursing down her cheek. "You died the death of a hero and martyr. You were a better American than a lot of two-legged animals that are allowed the freedom of our country!" Then, realizing that it was no time for useless grief, she started off toward the camp, accompanied by Daily. Her limbs were so cramped from the long ride, and she was so nearly exhausted, that Daily had to almost carry her.

As the first streaks of dawn lighted up the eastern horizon, they entered the camp. In a

few minutes Daily had the clubhouse inmates aroused, his posse armed and equipped, and, before it was entirely light, six men, including the doctor, were rushing to Malcomson's assistance. By the time they were well under way, Bascomb Gillespie was entering Rattlesnake Glen to stand guard until help arrived.

XVII

In Rattlesnake Glen

As Gillespie clambered down into the Glen, he was checked by a warning growl from Major. Reassuring the dog of his friendly intentions, he reached the place where Malcomson lay. He was astonished to find, instead of one solitary wounded man, two wounded and one dead.

"Hello, Malcomson, old boy!" he called out cheerfully. "What's been going on here? Had visitors?"

Malcomson was so weakened from loss of blood, the chill of the damp ground and the horrors of his night's vigil that he could scarcely speak. Gillespie rushed to the branch and brought water, bathed his face and hands, removing the blood stains from his face. Then he wrapped his own coat about him and raised him to a more restful position.

"Now," continued Gillespie, "as we have an hour or two to wait for the arrival of reinforcements, you might tell me some of the details of the occurrences of the last few hours. I will tell

you first, to put your mind at ease, that Matoaka got through safely and is in good hands. She killed her horse, but as the fool sheriff killed his too, he'll not be bragging any tomorrow, nor claiming the stakes of the race."

"Well," began Malcomson feebly, with long pauses between words, "it seems that someone saw Matoaka coming this way and reported. The gang got scared and sent two men to come and conceal my body more thoroughly lest the discovery might direct suspicion to them. The two men, never doubting that I was dead, came boldly down the hill, evidently in a hurry to get through with a disagreeable task. Their first intimation of interference was a growl from Major, such as he greeted you with on your arrival. The men were startled and one of them muttered 'Wildcat!' Where we lay it was so dark they could not see us, but the moon cast its light through the trees so as to give us a good view of their movements. They moved cautiously, looking for my dead body. Once more Major growled. 'Kin yer see ter shoot him?' asked one of them. I saw the man's arm go up as if to aim his gun. With a howl of rage, Major hurled himself at the man's throat. The fellow, taken completely by surprise, fired at random and missed, threw up his arm to ward off the attack,

tripped over a log and pitched headlong into the ravine, breaking his leg. He has been down there ever since, groaning, praying and cursing.

"The other man jumped behind a tree as Major rushed back to my side, growling with rage. He was endeavoring to get in position to take a shot when I called out, 'Throw up your hands! If you move I'll kill you!' It must have seemed to him like a voice from the other world,—the ghost of his murdered victim returning to haunt him. With a shriek of terror, he turned to run, but before he could get started, the shrill warning of a rattlesnake sang out directly behind him. The poor fellow seemed momentarily paralyzed with fear. He hesitated, and that delay cost him his life. The reptile struck, burying its fangs in the calf of his leg. Shrieking like a lost soul on the brink of perdition, the man rushed for the top of the bluff. By some means the fangs of the rattler became entangled in the cloth of the man's trouser and held the snake fast. As the man fled in terror, the snake's long body twisted and writhed about his legs in the most horrible manner! The poor wretch made several attempts at climbing the steep bank, but kept slipping back. On his last attempt he had got about half way up when, either overcome by fright, or already affected by the poison, he stopped, swayed for

a moment, and then toppled over; he came tumbling back into the Glen, the rattlesnake still winding and unwinding about his legs.

"I couldn't go to his assistance, and his injured companion was too much overcome to move or speak. Even Major was affected by the sight, and lay trembling at my side. The wretched creature rolled on the ground, calling wildly for help, varying his cries with appeals to high heaven for mercy and pardon. For an hour or more he kept up his incessant lamentations and agonizing, nerve-wracking cries. All the while that terrible reptile kept tugging and twisting and thrashing about. The cries and movements slowly subsided as the deadly poison did its work. The shrieks gradually merged into one low, long-drawn, quavering wail of absolute misery, and ceased. Then the snake became quiet, but I think if you look you will find him still clinging to the leg of his victim—and he's a whopper, too!"

Gillespie did look, and shot the snake's head off. From its tail he pulled fourteen rattles and a button to keep as souvenirs.

"Gillespie," said Malcomson earnestly. "I have seen terrible things in France, but I pray God to spare me from ever again having to witness a death like this moonshiner's. You have heard about a hell on earth? Well, I have seen it

tonight. From this time on I am going to be a Christian. I don't want to go where these poor derelicts are going and have to witness their eternal punishment."

"A good resolution!" approved Gillespie. "I have been trying it for several years and I find it a great comfort to know, as I daily carry my life in my hands, fighting these criminals, that if they get me I will be going where moonshiners cease from troubling and bootleggers give one a rest. I would hate to have to fight such reptiles through all eternity."

It was light now. Gillespie examined Malcomson's wounds. One bullet had cut a gash straight across the top of his head. Had it gone half an inch lower, it would have penetrated his brain. Another bullet had made a clean hole through his shoulder just above the heart. A third had struck a rib, splintering the bone. The fourth bullet had shattered his right forearm.

"Boy, they sure were going after you!" said Gillespie. "No wonder they thought you were dead. It's a shame to disappoint them! You must have a guardian angel following you, or else you weren't foreordained to die at the hands of an outlaw," continued Gillespie.

Just then approaching horsemen were heard on the trail, putting a stop to further conversa-

tion. Gillespie stepped behind a tree, ready to be on the defensive, not knowing whether it was friend or foe that approached. But he stepped out as he caught sight of Daily leading the cavalcade.

"Hitch your critters, boys, and come down!" he called. "Hurry up! The outlaws and rattlers will soon be on the move. We have killed some of both species and their avengers will be thirsting for gore!"

The doctor dressed the wounds of Malcomson and gave him and the crippled outlaw a hypodermic to ease the pain incident to moving them. They left the dead man for his own people to look after. He was sleeping on the bed he had helped prepare for Malcomson.

In a few hours the two men were safe in the hospital under the expert care of Matoaka. Three of the detectives remained in town for two weeks, one of them on guard day and night. A great conspiracy had been cleverly defeated, but most of the instigators were still at large, and while they were, Malcomson was not safe, even in a hospital.

XVIII

The Election

The political campaign was drawing to a close and the hopes of the friends of law and order ran high as election day drew near. The attempt on Malcomson's life and Matoaka's daring ride to defeat the outlaws had created a sensation. Malcomson in the hospital, slowly creeping back from the brink of the grave, was a more powerful advocate of reform than he could possibly have been on the platform.

The better class of people had their eyes rudely opened to the depths of depravity into which the lawless elements were ready to descend in order to accomplish their ends. Party lines were ignored in the supreme test of patriotism that called them to save the honor and integrity of the commonwealth. Even the big coal corporations woke up to the fact that they had been, by conniving with criminals, harboring in their midst a boomerang that would one day turn and strike them down. Realizing their error, these corporations wheeled

into line behind the standards of constitutional government.

The treacherous sheriff and his gang of political pirates were publicly denounced, and great numbers of their party followers abandoned their cause. Practically everyone was convinced that the sheriff had deliberately sent Malcomson into a death trap, and there was much talk of formally charging him with the crime.

The preacher visited Malcomson often and cheered him on the way to recovery with glowing accounts of the progress of their cherished plans. "With honest, patriotic men in power," he declared, "with the overthrow of the old gang of spoilsmen in this country, we will move forward many years in a single day. I have long hoped and prayed to see this new era, and when our high aims are achieved, I shall feel that my poor life has not been lived entirely in vain."

"I, too," agreed Malcomson, "feel that the spirit of Lincoln, who toiled, suffered and died for human emancipation, will yet prevail in his native state and in the nation; and, like dear old Stony Jack, I feel that it is a glorious thing to fight—and if God wills, to die—in defense of so great a country."

The first day Malcomson was allowed to venture out was election day. As he walked slowly

down the street by the Court House, he was given an ovation by scores of citizens who had come to have great respect for the quiet young man who had faced death in defense of justice at home with the same cool courage he had displayed when facing a foreign foe.

The election passed off without any display of violence. Threats were made, but the steady, determined spirit of the reformers overawed their adversaries. The women turned out in great numbers, and when the sun went down on that memorable day, the old gang of the old days, with their antiquated ways and ideas, was buried under an avalanche of ballots for the reform candidates.

Improved conditions were marked and immediate. An air of security and happiness was manifest among the people. The criminal class slunk into obscurity, maintaining none of its former bravado and defiance. The machinery of justice moved more smoothly and swiftly. The new circuit judge, Denby Grant, was himself a product of the mountains. He had been reared and educated among the mountaineers and knew all their peculiar traits of character, feelings and crude ideas of law and justice. At the opening session of his court, he introduced a daring innovation by having the preacher start proceedings

with prayer, invoking the aid and wisdom of the Judge of the Universe in dispensing justice to all offenders. This made a profound impression—as the judge had anticipated—upon the accused prisoners at the bar and all their friends; for in spite of their lawlessness, the mountaineers are deeply religious and not a little superstitious. The idea of having the especial attention of God directed in open court to their misdeeds was a little more than they expected, and their guilty hearts were pierced with deepest foreboding.

Heretofore, they had been accustomed to getting off with dire threats and light fines—fines which they could win back in one night's work at the still. But Judge Grant, in his opening address, crushed all their hopes of a continuation of this policy, assuring them that he would pursue a program of even-handed justice to all, without regard to rank, station or political affiliations.

"I did not make the laws," he said, "but I am sworn to uphold and enforce them. If you don't like the law, have it changed!"

Then he started the machinery going, and at the close of the first session of court the jail was so filled with old hardened moonshiners, bootleggers and perjurers that they had to enlarge the institution, and the road gang was so augmented that good roads appeared in the coun-

ty as if by magic. With so many of the worst offenders behind bars, or doing their first honest work in many years, a period of comparative calm followed the excitement preceding the election.

Matoaka went back to her duties at the hospital, riding to and from her work as usual. But now, instead of her beloved Rosewood, she was mounted on a magnificent horse—a gift from Malcomson's father as a token of his appreciation for the heroic services she had rendered in saving his son's life, and to replace the loss she had sustained in the death of Rosewood.

It was observed that the sheriff no longer joined her as she rode home in the evenings. Since the night of the wild ride and the events following, he had kept to himself and avoided meeting her. She was glad to be relieved of his unpleasant attentions, but felt quite sure that she was not yet free from his sinister designs upon herself and Malcomson. Such characters do not readily abandon their malevolent purposes of revengeful triumph. Through the failure of his plot he was furnished with additional motives for revenge, and the mortgage still hung over her father's head and farm. She was oppressed by a secret dread of future developments.

When able to travel, Malcomson, at the urgent request of his parents, paid a visit of several

weeks' duration to his home. Many thought he would never return. The outlaws breathed more freely and were hopeful that he might remain away. And for once Matoaka found herself in full accord with the outlaws in their hopes; not that she did not want him near her—she would sadly miss his visits and companionship—but she knew he was marked for death by a band of cunning, relentless murderers, which would never rest until its vows were fulfilled. To save him from this impending fate, she would gladly have sacrificed all personal considerations.

She would have urged him to stay away, but knew the uselessness of such a course; she could not ask him to violate his conscience or play the role of a cowardly slacker. She would be as brave and steadfast as he, and when the dreaded day arrived she would smother her grief and carry on alone—*so terribly alone!*

Alonzo Whitfield remained more at home during the Winter, and Matoaka was led to hope that he might be trying to break with his old cronies before he met the fate of several of his neighbors.

As Spring advanced and nature stirred dead things into life, the outlaws began to show signs of activity, and several questionable characters, on doubtful missions, were seen in various

localities. Malcomson returned about this same time, unannounced and unexpected, save to Matoaka. He had entirely recovered and was in splendid condition for new activities. His arrival was received by both sides as a signal to prepare for the final test of strength—the last desperate struggle between law and anarchy.

XIX

Last Stand of the Outlaws

Malcomson's plan of action was to strike—swift and hard—at the gang's stronghold in the cavern and, if possible, capture the leaders. He was more confident now of success, since he had the hearty co-operation of a sheriff and several deputies, who had proved their metal on the fields of France.

The outlaws seemed to sense the plans of the authorities and at once began fortifying the old cabin and storing there a large supply of high-power rifles, ammunition and food. They even commenced the work of digging an underground tunnel from the cavern as a means of escape should they be too closely pressed by the officers. The quick action of Malcomson prevented this latter work from being completed. Malcomson kept watch, and, observing the activities of the outlaws, hastened his own preparations. A look-out was stationed near the cabin, and the deputies were charged to be armed and ready to move at a moment's notice.

One afternoon the lookout reported an assemblage of twelve or fifteen outlaws in the cabin, evidently bent on some important move. Malcomson promptly gave orders to move late that evening. He went in person to the hospital to tell Matoaka his plans. She hastened away to try, if possible, to keep her father at home that night, but he had already left for the cabin. She spent the night in an agony of suspense.

At dusk, three groups of officers quietly slipped out of town by different roads, with orders to converge at the cabin. They arrived two hours later and took up their stations in the bushes and laurel thickets to await developments. Their plan was to guard the place carefully until daylight before making the attack, unless the outlaws should force their hand by coming out.

A dim light was shining in the cabin and occasionally the shadow of a form flitted about the room. The light revealed that the window had been boarded up with heavy planks, leaving port holes here and there at convenient places.

Toward midnight, a man was seen approaching cautiously in the direction of the cabin. He had observed one group of officers leaving town and, suspecting their mission, had come to warn his friends. He was not certain he had arrived in time and was approaching with great caution

directly toward the spot where Malcomson and four other officers were concealed. Malcomson gave orders to two of the men to seize the intruder, without noise if possible. The night was dark and cloudy and the man walked blindly into the trap. The two men sprang upon him and bore him to the ground, pressing the barrel of a pistol into his stomach, with a warning of silence which he obeyed. He was soon tied to a nearby sapling and the men resumed their vigil.

The hours passed slowly. All was quiet in the cabin. Either the outlaws were below, working on the tunnel, or manufacturing whiskey. As the gray light of dawn began to streak the eastern horizon, movements were heard inside. The door opened slowly and a man's head protruded, cautiously turning from side to side. Seeing nothing to arouse his suspicions, he stepped out. The man tied to the tree coughed slightly and wriggled. The quick ear and eye of the outlaw caught the signal and, with an oath, he jumped back, slamming the door shut.

"Well, my friend," said Malcomson dryly, "since you are so keen to aid your friends, we will give you a chance to render them some real service. We are here to capture these men and destroy their headquarters. The place is surrounded by guards, well armed and ready to

shoot. Escape is impossible. Now, you take this note to the window there and hand it in to your friends. Bring back their answer. Don't linger long, and remember!—the first false move you make will be your death warrant. Now, go!"

The man obeyed with alacrity, and was back in a few moments with their answer.

"Well?" demanded Malcomson shortly.

"The chief said," replied the prisoner, "that if you want us come and git us, but you'll have a hot time doin' it!"

The gang's defiance had scarcely been delivered when a heavy volley was fired from the cabin, the bullets striking in the weeds and bushes all about the messenger. The outlaws had rightly judged that the officers were there. Two men were slightly wounded. An answering volley was poured into the cabin from three sides, and the big, decisive battle was on.

Malcomson and his immediate command crept back farther into the underbrush and again tied their prisoner to a tree out of the range of the guns. Malcomson had left orders with the new sheriff to send reinforcements and a doctor, if no word came from them by noon. "They will be needed by that time," he had said.

The battle raged without intermission, both sides using high-power rifles—the bullets from

the officers' guns splintering and tearing to pieces the barricades over the windows, while the shots from the outlaws knocked fire from the rocks and bark from the trees as they struck all about the officers.

About nine o'clock the fire of the outlaws slackened and Malcomson was encouraged to believe they were planning to surrender or make a dash for liberty. He hoped it might be the former. His forces had suffered severely. Two brave deputies were already dead, two others badly wounded and several others slightly hurt. He would soon need reinforcements, and a doctor was badly wanted.

He did not wish to prolong the battle. He knew with what feelings of distress Matoaka was awaiting the issue of the conflict, and was anxious to spare her unnecessary pain. She had not gone to the hospital that morning, remaining at home awaiting the outcome of the battle,—a battle that, no matter how it terminated, must mean heartbreaking sorrow for her.

The lull in the firing was filled by the outlaws in bringing up fresh supplies and removing wounded men to a spot where they would not interfere with activities. Again the conflict commenced.

The firing of the officers had shattered the door and barricades of the windows, so that the

outlaws could not shift their positions without great danger, and they were, therefore, forced to stick closely to their posts. As the noon hour approached, the firing from the cabin slackened, and this time a piece of white cloth was pushed out through the rickety door.

Malcomson ordered a truce. The door was pushed open and Alonzo Whitfield stood before them, haggard, shoes and coat off, hair disheveled and blood trickling down his pale face.

"Boys," he said. "I quit! I can't go on. I kin fight the livin', but not the dead! I've bin fightin' agin' my dead boy an' the flag he fit an' died fur! I seed him last night hyar in the dark. He was all white, only whar blood streaked his face. He was a pintin' a bloody finger at me, scornful like, an' a shamin' me. Yer can't beat ther law o' Gawd A'mghty. It gits yer somewhar. I don't want ter die a fightin' my boy. I want to sur———"

Bang! Bang! Two shots rang out from the cabin, and Alonzo Whitfield lurched forward, falling on his face in the yard, shot through the heart by his own men.

Simultaneously with the bark of the two guns from the cabin, a third heavy shot rang out from a thicket to the right of the house, and Malcomson, who had stood up when Alonzo came out, felt a stinging blow on the side of the head that

knocked his hat off. He dropped in the weeds, wiping blood from the place where he was struck. Houchins, concealed nearby, saw a wisp of smoke curling up from the laurel thicket and fired twice at the spot. A howl, as from one mortally wounded, followed the second shot.

"That sounds powerfully like the gentle voice of 'Hell-Roarin' Felix'," observed the officer with a grin, "but we'll let him howl until this fight is over. It's every man for himself now!"

Malcomson was not seriously hurt, the bullet having struck a glancing, superficial blow. Reinforcements arrived, led by the sheriff in person, and Doctor Johnson found plenty of work.

With the arrival of recruits, Malcomson and the sheriff decided to end the matter by rushing the enemy. Two men obtained a heavy piece of timber for a battering ram, a small guard was left at the rear of the cabin to cut off retreat, and the other officers formed for mass action. Pouring a terrific fire into the cabin with their rifles, they seized their automatic pistols and made the rush.

As the two men smashed the timber through the door, hurling it from its hinges, one of them dropped with a bullet in his leg, and the sheriff received a flesh wound in the arm. Only three men were found in the cabin able to stand, and even they were badly wounded.

A sickening sight met the gaze of the officers. The floor was a mass of blood. Five men were dead, in addition to Alonzo Whitfield. They also found a dead woman lying across the body of her husband, with an empty pistol in her lifeless hand. She had come to the cabin in the evening to persuade her husband to go home, and when he refused, she and her two small children remained, determined to stand by him. They found the children—a little boy and girl, not old enough to know what it was all about—cowering in the opening to the cavern.

Carrying the dead and wounded to a safe distance, the sheriff, making sure there were no men in the cavern, exploded several sticks of dynamite in the entrance, utterly destroying its further usefulness for moonshining purposes. Then they burned the cabin.

Cries were still issuing from the bushes beyond the house, and Houchins and the sheriff cautiously investigated. They found the ex-sheriff lying on the ground helpless, suffering intense pain. They summoned Doctor Johnson, who did what he could to relieve him but shook his head. The shot had struck him in the back as he turned to flee, and had so injured his spine that he was paralyzed below the hips. While he might not die, he would never walk again.

As rapidly as possible the wounded men were

transferred to the hospital, and the bodies of the two dead officers, five outlaws and one woman were taken to the Court House to be claimed by relatives. Malcomson helped carry Whitfield's body home. Matoaka met them on the porch with tearless eyes and compressed lips. She made no comment as she opened the door and indicated the bed on which to lay the body of her father. Noticing the blood on Malcomson's head, she exclaimed, "*You* are hurt!"

"Only a scratch," he replied, "but it has been a sad day. Two fine officers are dead and a dozen wounded."

"Do you know who killed him?" she asked, nodding toward the bed.

"His own men; and I am thankful—if it had to be—that it was that way. I would be sorry to go through life haunted by the thought that possibly I had fired the shot that killed the father of Stony Jack." He turned to go, then came back and said, "It may be some comfort to you to know that you need have no further fears concerning Felix Luster. He is helpless for life. As his last public act, he gave me this token of his regard." And he pointed to his blood-stained head. "I'll send out the preacher," Malcomson concluded. "He is needed here."

"Bring him," corrected Matoaka softly. "You are both needed!"

XX

A Day of Mourning

Sad, depressing days followed the battle—a battle which marked the last desperate stand of the outlaws. Many homes and hearts were touched by the tragedy. The slain men were widely connected with many of the mountain families by blood and marriage ties. The slain officers were, some of them, relatives of the dead moonshiners. In a way it was a family fight. The grief and mourning was widespread, and the more impressive because of the absence of demonstration. The sense of the inexorable fatality of God's eternal decrees paralyzed their emotions, and the survivors made no protest.

The funerals were attended by great throngs of people of all classes, and there was a conspicuous absence of any spirit of revenge among the friends of the dead moonshiners, such as had been in evidence on all previous occasions of the kind. The spirit of the outlaws and their friends was utterly crushed, and all power of resistance broken.

The defeat had been so overwhelming, the fatalities so great, that all were deeply impressed with the invincibility of the government's power when wielded by officers truly patriotic and honest. The mountaineers realized for the first time the absolute futility of opposing law by brute force. Most of their leaders were dead or in the hospital under arrest awaiting the convening of Judge Grant's court, when they would begin to pay the penalty for their crimes.

The funeral of Alonzo Whitfield was the most solemn and impressive of all; the crowd in attendance unparalleled in size. The Whitfield family was an old and respected one, connected in some way with every prominent family of the wide countryside. The fall of Alonzo into evil ways and his tragic and shameful death, was the one dark blot upon a name honored through several generations. He was the single black sheep to stray from the fold. The funeral services were held in the yard beneath the oaks, and the burial was made in the old family graveyard behind the orchard, where slept Alonzo's father, mother, and grandparents.

The deepest sympathy of everyone went out to Matoaka and her mother in their crushing sorrow, a sorrow made more poignant because the death of Alonzo had been indirectly brought

about by a dear friend of the family, Stony Jack's comrade-in-arms, whose sense of duty to country and justice would not permit him to spare even the feelings of his closest friends.

The preacher spoke the last words over the silent form of his old-time friend, who had recently been estranged from him because of sin. He took for his text the thirty-third verse of the third chapter of the Second Book of Samuel: *"Shall Abner die as the fool dieth?"* In his discourse, the preacher emphasized the eternal truth that "The wages of sin is death," and that "The way of the transgressor is hard." 'Hard' because he arrays himself against the laws of nature, the revealed law of God and the best interests of society. That he not only wrongs himself, but his fellowmen, his Maker and Redeemer. "The very stars in their courses fight against him," and his defeat is inevitable.

Continuing, the preacher scathingly denounced the reckless outlaw, who, by his contemptuous disregard of government, would, like Sampson, pull down the pillars supporting the temple of justice and involve himself and society in one common ruin. He urged that the criminal class not only be held guilty of its own shed blood, but also of that of the murdered officers. He showed how the innocent women and children of

these enemies of orderly society were the helpless victims of the violence of the criminal, unwilling partners in his shame and misfortune. Under the preacher's eloquence, the vast assemblage stood silent, stern, impressed. The preacher closed his impassioned appeal with a brief prayer for all the unhappy victims, imploring divine mercy upon a stricken community, and the throng moved silently to the little family burying place. As they stood there, moved to thoughts of a new era of law-abiding citizenship, the horizon brightened with a glow promising the dawn of a new and better day.

XXI

A New Day

On Monday following the week of the tragedy, Matoaka resumed her duties at the hospital, taking up the burden of the care of the wounded men. One of these was the ex-sheriff, the most terribly injured of the whole gang. During the days preceding and succeeding the funerals, Felix was almost entirely ignored by everyone, except the doctors and nurses. Outlaws and good citizens alike had in some way come to regard him as responsible for the bloody calamity that had fallen upon the community. All felt that, while his punishment was dreadful, it was just; he had forfeited the sympathy of everyone. He might live for several years, a helpless cripple with plenty of time for meditation and making his peace with God; but never again would he play fast and loose with the sacred principles of justice and constitutional government.

Malcomson frequently found it convenient to ride home with Matoaka at the close of her day's work. Both were saddened by the distressing

events of the past months and both had that brooding look that is seen in the eyes of those who have walked hand in hand with Death and stood on the brink of Eternity, gazing into the mysteries of the Great Unknown.

Malcomson had decided that as the administration of the state's business was in the hands of patriotic citizens, his work as a government agent was completed. He had risked his life on many occasions and freely and gladly shed his blood for the honor of his country. The vindication of his sacrifice lay in the hands of the loyal men and women who would guard their hard-won liberties at the election booths.

As Malcomson and Matoaka were riding home one evening, he conveyed these thoughts to the girl. She was secretly delighted to know that he contemplated giving up his dangerous position, but distressed over the thought of his departure. She had grown more and more dependent upon him as the days passed by. "What business do you have in mind taking up?" she asked.

"Just now," he replied, "the coal business appeals to me. It has tremendous possibilities."

They had reached her gate. "Come in!" she urged, "and have supper with us. I would like to talk over your future plans more fully. You see, I must take father's place now, look after

the farm and pay off the heavy mortgage which Felix holds against us. Poor Felix!" she added sadly. "He will need his money now; he is so helpless and looks so pitiful. He always has a look in his hollow eyes like a sheep-killing dog caught in the act and expecting to be shot."

"Do you think your mother will care to have me stay?" Malcomson asked hesitantly.

"Oh, yes," she urged. "Mother understands and holds no ill-will. She never approved of father's course and always felt that it would end as it did. Mother likes you very much."

They went in together, and after supper, sat on the porch; Malcomson seated in Whitfield's old hickory chair, and Matoaka on a low stool opposite. They talked for a long while of the various phases of the coal business, and discussed plans for the future. The evening was warm and pleasant; the moonbeams rested softly on the valley and mountains, playing hide-and-seek with the shadows in ravines and about the cliffs. A light breeze stirred the leaves of the oak trees and rustled the corn blades in the garden. An owl was hooting in the distant forest, while myriads of insects provided an accompaniment of monotonous droning.

Mrs. Whitfield and the children had retired. Major lay dozing on the porch, starting up occa-

sionally and emitting low growls as he re-lived in memory the stirring scenes of his life in Belgium, or the events of Rattlesnake Glen.

Conversation lagged. The coal business had been exhausted as a matter for discussion. Malcomson and Matoaka were both busy with their own thoughts—thoughts that traveled fast and far over the checkered careers they had pursued since first they met. Both had a feeling that tonight marked another turning point in their lives—a crisis too pregnant for words.

Malcomson broke the silence, speaking earnestly. "Matoaka," he began, "before we discuss business further, there is one point we must settle. Your decision in this matter will have much to do with my future planning. Ever since we were in France together, I have loved you. I would have asked you to marry me, but we were both upset and our lives deranged by the turmoil of war, and I thought it best to wait. Twice I have given my life into the hands of the government to be used in defense of the nation's life. On both occasions you stepped in and drew me back from the brink of eternity. That I am here tonight, speaking these words, is due to your heroic services and steadfast courage. And I feel that from every viewpoint, I belong to you, if you wish to claim your rights.

"On the battlefields in France the blood of Stony Jack was mingled with mine on your pictured face. Stony Jack often spoke of you, and loved you with a deep and abiding love. You were his last thought, and your name was the last he tried to speak. I would be happy to have you take his place as my comrade, and I to take his place as your brother—and more—your husband. Will you accept me?"

Matoaka sat with bowed head, silently weeping, as he spoke of Stony Jack. Raising her head as he concluded, her eyes shone through her tears, and she replied, "Bruce, since I first saw you that morning in the hospital, and learned your name, I have loved you. Day after day, my love deepened, and through all the glorious time we were together over there, and returning, my love grew stronger. It was my love for you that held me to my purpose on that dreadful ride over the mountains, and gave me strength to turn against my father and violate all the customs of our people.

"I love you now!" and, with a smile, she added, "and I claim my own. I saved you from death, partly from the selfish motive of having you for myself alone!"

Without a word, he folded her in his arms in a long embrace, while Major wagged his tail

knowingly, and the moon seemed to smile approval.

After a few moments Matoaka struggled to escape from his arms, saying, "There is one condition I forgot to mention. That must be understood before I claim payment of your debt. You know the ex-sheriff holds a heavy mortgage on our home, and I cannot forsake mother and the younger children. I must first see the place clear before I can come with you. I could not think of hampering my husband, at the outset of his business career, with a burden of old debts."

"Would you marry me soon," he asked eagerly, "if the mortgage was out of the way?"

"Yes. Within a few weeks," she replied.

"Well, then, you can start preparations at once for the joyous event," he said, "and notify the preacher."

"Why, what do you mean, Bruce?" she demanded, puzzled.

"That I purchased the mortgage from Felix and had him cancel it several days ago," he replied. "So instead of having to sell yourself to the ex-sheriff to liquidate your father's indebtedness, I shall make you a wedding present of the mortgage, after the preacher ties the knot."

"But, Bruce!" she cried in utter confusion. "How on earth could you pay off that heavy mortgage?"

"With money!" he returned gaily.

She was completely bewildered, and sat gazing at him in open-eyed wonder.

Laughingly he continued, "Since you are to be my wife within a few weeks, I may as well tell you that I am not the penniless chap you have taken me for, just beginning a business career. After graduating from college, I was associated, for a while, with my father in business, prior to my enlistment. My father is a large manufacturer and coal operator. I can resume my relations with his firm and locate here, supervising the interests of the company in this vicinity."

"Where are your coal properties?" she asked, regaining her speech.

"We own the lease on your farm, besides two or three larger operations farther down the river," he replied.

"Why," cried Matoaka, "my father said the company that owned this lease was one of the most influential in the whole country!"

"Well," he temporized, "not quite that. There are a few others bigger, but our corporation is quite a long way from the foot of the class."

Matoaka had risen to her feet during his amazing revelations. She sat down now, burying her face in her trembling hands. "Oh, Bruce! You

have killed all the romance of our wedding day," she wailed. "Here I was, thinking and planning how we would have to begin at the bottom and work together for years to save and build our fortune by our own exertions. Besides—I, a poor moonshiner's daughter, can't marry you—a millionaire's son. What would your people say?"

"That I have shown excellent judgment in my choice," he replied confidently. "My people know that they owe it to you that I am still with them. They will be delighted to receive you as their daughter."

Even his reassurances did not serve to calm the sobs that shook her. He stroked her hair gently, saying, "You need a rest, dear—we both do—and before settling down to the business of living, we will take a long vacation to recover our poise after the strenuous experiences we have both been through. I want to visit the old battlefields and the spot where Stony Jack sleeps. We will go to southern France, where we spent the golden days of my convalescence. I want to cross the ocean once more with you, and dream some of our dreams all over again. I want you to pay a long visit to my home, and see where I spent my boyhood days.

"Then, in a year or so, we will come back to these hills and here we will build our home and

spend our lives among the purest-blooded Americans on the continent."

Persuaded by his eloquence and the dictates of her own heart, Matoaka spent a month in happy preparations for the day of days. Malcomson's father and mother came down to honor the event and bestow their blessings, and other guests were invited from among the immediate friends of the lovers. Mrs. Whitfield, with true southern hospitality, 'did herself proud' in the preparation of the wedding breakfast.

Matoaka had elected to have the ceremony performed in the early morning, intending to start immediately after breakfast on their long, blissful honeymoon. "You see," she explained, with brimming eyes, "it will be the dawn of that wonderful new day for me the preacher talks so much about."

And so it happened one morning, just as the great sun peeped over the sombre brow of Big Black Mountain. The two lovers, who had been purified from selfish dross in the terrible fires of the furnace of war and civil strife, stood under the wide branches of the great oaks, amid the bloom and fragrance of flowers, and took the vows which were a seal upon the new life they were to spend together.

THE END

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